

## Course Outline

An Introduction to the Feasts of Israel

Passover (*Pesach*)

Unleavened Bread

Firstfruits (*Yom Habikkurim*)

Pentecost (*Shavuot*)

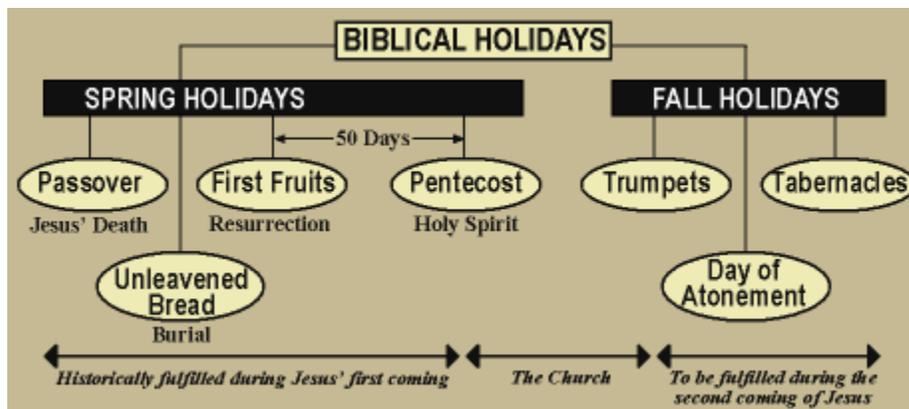
Trumpets (*Rosh Hashanah*)

The Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*)

Tabernacles (*Sukkot*)

### An Introduction to the Feasts of Israel

The feasts of Israel are religious celebrations remembering God’s great acts of salvation in the history of His people. The term “feasts” in Hebrew literally means “appointed times” and in Scripture the feasts often are called “holy convocations.” They are times God has appointed for holy purposes – times in which the Lord meets with men and women. While there are many religious celebrations in Jewish history and custom, seven are most significant: Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles (see “Biblical Holidays” chart below). God established the timing and sequence of these feasts to reveal to us a special story – most significantly, the work of the Messiah in the redemption of mankind and the establishment of His Kingdom on earth.



Source: Biblical Holidays ([www.biblicaltholidays.com](http://www.biblicaltholidays.com))

**Why seven feasts?** The number seven is significant in Scripture. It is tied to completeness or fullness. For example, God rested on the seventh day after creation, not because He was tired but because His work was complete and He was fully satisfied in it. The cycle of the seven-day week provided the basis for much of Israel’s worship. In addition, the seventh month features four of the seven feasts; the seventh year and the 50<sup>th</sup> year (the year of Jubilee, following seven cycles of seven years) also are significant.

There are several key truths to keep in mind as we study the feasts:

- ▶ The Lord established the feasts and gave them to Israel.

- ▶ The feasts were based on the Jewish lunar calendar (12 months of 29 or 30 days per month).
- ▶ The feasts relate to Israel's spring and fall agricultural seasons; Israel was and still is, to a great extent, an agricultural nation.
- ▶ They picture the timing, sequence and significance of the Messiah's redemptive work.
- ▶ Though the feasts were given to Israel, every person is invited to meet with God and receive His gracious blessings through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- ▶ There is a binding relationship between Israel and the church even though they are distinct entities with distinct promises. God's unconditional covenant with Abraham promised, "In thy (Abraham's) seed shall all nations be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). "Every blessing which the true Church now enjoys and every hope she anticipates come out of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants which God made with Israel" (*The Feasts of the Lord* by Kevin Howard and Marvin Rosenthal, p. 14).
- ▶ The number of feasts – seven – relates to the Biblical number for completion. The full work and revelation of Messiah/Christ is pictured in the seven feasts.
- ▶ All seven feasts are found in Leviticus 23; additional passages in the Old and New Testaments also address the feasts.

"To summarize, these seven feasts of the Lord are God's appointed times during which He will meet with men for holy purposes. When completed, these seven special holidays will triumphantly bring an end to this age and usher in a glorious 'Golden Age'" ([www.christcenteredmall.com](http://www.christcenteredmall.com)).

***Why study the feasts?*** There are several good reasons to study the feasts: 1) to remember God's goodness; 2) to understand more fully His divine revelation through "types;" 3) to increase our knowledge of God's plan through the work of His eternal Son; 4) to more fully appreciate the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf; and 5) to joyfully anticipate the days in which Jesus will return and establish His Kingdom on earth.

***Why do so many Jewish people observe the feasts but fail to grasp their significance?*** In part, because they have added so many man-made rules and customs to the Lord's feasts that they are consumed with religious ritual rather than with zeal for God. In addition, the hardening of the Jewish heart has provided opportunity for Gentile believers to be grafted into the true church, made up of those "from every nation, tribe, people, and language" who worship Jesus as Lord (Rev. 7:9; see also Rom. 11:11-12).

## The Feasts of Our Lord

Name	Scriptures	Time / Date	Purpose	Fulfillment
<b>Passover</b>	Ex. 12:1-28, 43-49; Lev. 23:5; Num. 28:16; Deut. 16:1-8	14 <sup>th</sup> day of Nisan (March/April)	To commemorate Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage.	<b><u>Redemption:</u></b> Christ's death as our Passover Lamb (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Peter 1:18-19)
<b>Unleavened Bread</b>	Ex. 12:15-20, 13:3-10; Lev. 23:6-8; Num. 28:17-25; Deut. 16:3-8	15 <sup>th</sup> day of Nisan (March/April); continues for seven days	To commemorate the hardships of Israel's escape from Egypt.	<b><u>Sanctification:</u></b> Christ's burial; His body did not suffer decay (John 6:30-59; 1 Cor. 11:24)
<b>Firstfruits</b>	Lev. 23:9-14	16 <sup>th</sup> day of Nisan (March/April)	To dedicate the firstfruits of the barley harvest.	<b><u>Resurrection:</u></b> Christ's bodily resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20-23)
<b>Pentecost</b>	Lev. 23:15-22; Num. 28:26-31; Deut. 16:9-12	50 days after First Fruits (May/June)	To dedicate the firstfruits of the wheat harvest.	<b><u>Origination:</u></b> The outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the birthday of the church (Acts 2)
<b>Trumpets</b>	Lev. 23:23-25; Num. 10:10, 29:1-6	1 <sup>st</sup> day of Tishri (September/October)	To usher in the seventh month.	<b><u>Deliverance:</u></b> The rapture of the church (Matt. 24:31; 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16)
<b>Atonement</b>	Lev. 23:26-32; Num. 29:7-11	10 <sup>th</sup> day of Tishri (September/October)	To make annual atonement for sins.	<b><u>Repentance:</u></b> The crucifixion, and Israel's repentance at the return of Christ
<b>Tabernacles</b>	Lev. 23:33-43; Num. 29:12-38; Deut. 16:13-17	15 <sup>th</sup> – 21 <sup>st</sup> of Tishri, with an 8 <sup>th</sup> day added as a climax to all the feasts (September/October)	To commemorate God's protection during the wilderness wanderings and to rejoice in the harvest.	<b><u>Restoration:</u></b> The peace and prosperity of God's Kingdom on earth

## The Jewish Religious Calendar

<u>Month</u>	<u>Length</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Feast</u> <a href="#">[Other holidays]</a>
1. Nisan	30 days	Nisan 14 Nisan 15-21 Nisan 16	Passover Unleavened Bread Firstfruits
2. Iyar	29 days		
3. Sivan	30 days	Sivan 6	Shavuot (Weeks)
4. Tammuz	29 days		
5. Av	30 days	<a href="#">[Av 9]</a>	<a href="#">[Tisha B'Av]</a>
6. Elul	29 days		
7. Tishri	30 days	Tishri 1  Tishri 10  Tishri 15-21	Rosh Hashanah (Trumpets) Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) Sukkot (Tabernacles)
8. Heshvan	29 or 30 days		
9. Kislev	29 or 30 days	<a href="#">[Kislev 25 – Tevet 2/3]</a>	<a href="#">[Hannukkah]</a>
10. Tevet	29 days		
11. Shevat	30 days		
12. Adar	29 days (30 in leap year)	<a href="#">[Adar 14]</a>	<a href="#">[Purim]</a>

### Old Testament Sacrifices



Following is a brief description of five types of sacrifices in the Old Testament. This will help us better understand the offerings made in conjunction with the seven feasts of Israel and how the feasts foreshadow the work of Christ.

(Illustration from [www.abu.nb.ca](http://www.abu.nb.ca))

#### Burnt offering (*'olah*)

An offering completely burned to ashes. It was used to worship God, seek His favor, ask forgiveness from sin, or avert judgment. The object to be sacrificed was an unblemished male bull, ox, sheep or goat; the poor could offer a dove or pigeon. God's portion: the entire animal. The priest's portion: nothing. The offerer's portion: nothing.

Scriptures: Lev. 1; 6:8-13; 8:18-21; 16:24.

#### Sin offering (*hatta't*)

Also known as the purification offering. This was the most important Old Testament sacrifice for cleansing from sin and impurities. It made amends for specific unintentional sins and provided purification from certain forms of ceremonial uncleanness. The object offered was a young bull for the high priest and the entire nation; a male goat for a tribal leader; a female goat or lamb for commoners; two doves or pigeons for the poor; two pounds of fine flour for the very poor; two goats and a ram on the Day of Atonement (one goat carried the sins of the nation into the wilderness). God's portion: the fat covering the innards, the kidneys, liver, and caul (the fold of membrane loaded with fat that covers the intestines in mammals). The priest's portion: all the remainder, which had to be eaten within the court of the tabernacle. The offerer's portion: nothing.

Scriptures: Lev. 4:1-5, 13; 6:24-30; 8:14-17; 16:3-22.

#### Trespass / guilt offering (*'asham*)

An offering to make up for cheating the Lord or unintentionally destroying something that belonged to Him; also to pay restitution to a person who had been robbed or cheated, payable at 6/5<sup>ths</sup> in advance. The object sacrificed was a ram without blemish. God's portion: the fat covering the innards, the kidneys, liver, and caul. The priest's portion: all the remainder, which had to be eaten within the court of the tabernacle. The offerer's portion: nothing.

Scriptures: Lev. 5:14 – 6:7; 7:1-6.

### Peace / fellowship offering (*shelamin*)

An animal offering was given to maintain and strengthen a person's relationship with God and with other believers. It was not required as a remedy for impurity or sin but was an expression of thanksgiving for various blessings. An important function of this sacrifice was to provide meat for the priests and the participants in the sacrifice. Peace offerings were the only offerings the worshiper ate. In fact, they constituted a communion meal in which, symbolically, everyone ate together: God, priest, worshiper, and other believers. There were three types of peace offerings:

- **Thank offering** (*towday*), given for an unexpected blessing or deliverance already granted by God. The object sacrificed was an unblemished male or female ox, sheep or goat. God's portion: the fatty portions of the animal. The priest's portion: for the wave offering, the breast was given to the high priest; for the heave offering, the right foreleg was given to the officiating priest. The offerer's portion: the remainder of the animal, to be eaten in the court the same day as a community meal with others. Scripture: Lev. 7:12-15.
- **Votive offering** (*neder*), given for blessing or deliverance already granted, when a vow had been made in support of the prayer for blessing or deliverance. The object sacrificed was an unblemished male or female ox, sheep or goat. God's portion: the fatty portions of the animal. The priest's portion: for the wave offering, the breast was given to the high priest; for the heave offering, the right foreleg was given to the officiating priest. The offerer's portion: the remainder of the animal, to be eaten in the court the same day or the next day as a community meal with others. Scripture: Lev. 7:16.
- **Freewill offering** (*nedabah*), given to express general thankfulness and love toward God, without regard for specific blessings. The object sacrificed was a male or female ox, sheep, or goat, and minor imperfections were permitted. God's portion: the fatty portions of the animal. The priest's portion: for the wave offering, the breast was given to the high priest; for the heave offering, the right foreleg was given to the officiating priest. The offerer's portion: the remainder of the animal, to be eaten in the court the same day or the next day as a community meal with others. Scripture: Lev. 7:16.

### Grain and drink offerings

These offerings often were given with burnt offerings and peace offerings, and sometimes given by themselves, to worship God by giving thanks and to recognize God as the giver of all blessings. The object sacrificed was a mixture of fine wheat flour, olive oil and incense; bread baked without yeast or honey in loaves or wafers or fried in flat wafers; sometimes salt was added. Scriptures: Lev. 2; 6:14-23.

Sources: "The Four Blood Sacrifices in the Old Testament," [www.new-life.net](http://www.new-life.net); "Old Testament Sacrifices and Offerings," [www.bibles.com](http://www.bibles.com).

# The Feast of Passover

Name	Scriptures	Time / Date	Purpose	Fulfillment
Passover	Ex. 12:1-28, 43-49; Lev. 23:5; Num. 28:16; Deut. 16:1-8	14 <sup>th</sup> day of Nisan (March/April)	To commemorate Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage.	<b><u>Redemption:</u></b> Christ's death as our Passover John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Peter 1:18-19

## Background

Passover is the oldest continuously observed feast in existence today. In fact, there was only one Passover, 3,500 years ago in Egypt, when the angel of death passed over the homes of believing Jews who sacrificed a spotless lamb and sprinkled its blood on their doorposts, sparing the loss of their first-born males. In the same way, there was only one occasion when the Messiah's body was pierced and His blood poured out for our sins. To memorialize His coming death, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper during the feast of Passover. Just as faithful Jews have observed the Passover for 35 centuries, Christians have observed the memorial meal of the Lord's Supper for 2,000 years.

Observance of Passover was so important to the Jews that for those who had become defiled, an alternate date was given 30 days later.

## The Biblical Observance

The background of Passover is found in Exodus 12, which highlights three symbolic foods:

- **The lamb.** This had to be a young male lamb that was perfect in every way. He was brought into the house on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nisan and observed for four days so that his perfection could be confirmed, and so the lamb became precious to the family. When the lamb was sacrificed, he had to be roasted completely by fire and all of him was to be consumed. All of this pictures the perfect and sinless Messiah, who was observed, loved and completely consumed by God's judgment for our sins (2 Cor. 5:21). Truly, Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29); truly, He is Christ our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7).

- **Matzah** – a flat bread with no yeast. It was punctured and scored. This symbolizes Christ’s body, which contained no sin and was pierced and scored for us (Isa. 53:3-6).
- **Bitter herbs.** These symbolize the hardship of captivity and the suffering of the lamb.

## The Modern Observance

The *Seder* meal (*Seder* means “order”) features four cups, which symbolize four expressions of joy because of God’s promises:

- “I will bring you out.”
- “I will rescue you from bondage.”
- “I will redeem you.”
- “I will take you as My people.”

The *Seder* meal generally follows the pattern below and takes many hours to complete. Before the meal begins (and in preparation for the Feast of Unleavened Bread), the house is purged of all leaven (yeast) and the table, featuring fine linen and special dinnerware, is set. The father leads the ceremony.

**The first cup – the cup of sanctification.** This is to celebrate the promise of God, “I will bring you out (of Egypt).” The family’s Passover leader (in the Gospels, Jesus in the upper room) prays, “We praise you, O Lord our God, creator of the fruit of the vine ... The cup is a symbol of joy. Let us drink from it and be reminded of the joy that is ours as a result of our salvation.”

**Washing of hands.** This is a symbolic gesture of cleansing and purity before God. It was at this point that Jesus washed his disciples’ feet (John 13:4-5), showing that through His suffering and death He would cleanse them.

**Karpas – the green vegetable.** This bitter herb is dipped in salt water and eaten. The salt water symbolizes the tears of slavery; the green vegetable, the bitterness of captivity.

**The “middle” matzah is broken in half.** A white cloth napkin with three compartments is brought out. There are loaves of *matzah* – unleavened bread – in each compartment. The middle *matzah* is taken out and broken in half. Half is returned to the napkin; the other half is hidden in the house.

**Questions.** The youngest child sits to the father’s right and asks rehearsed questions that enable the father to tell the story of Passover. The first question asked is, “Why is this night different from all other nights?” This is in fulfillment of Ex. 12:26. In the upper room, the apostle John was seated at Jesus’ right and probably was the youngest of Jesus’ followers.

**The second cup.** This cup celebrates the promise of God: “I will rescue you from bondage.” One drop of wine is spilled out for each of the 10 plagues upon Egypt. The *Hallel* (Psalms 113-118) is recited.

**Dipping of the *matzah*.** The upper *matzah* and the one-half of the middle *matzah* still in the napkin are broken and distributed. Each participant dips his or her piece in horseradish and *haroset* (apple mixture), symbolizing redemption in the midst of slavery. Everyone eats a “Hillel sandwich,” two pieces of *matzah* with enough horseradish to bring tears to the eyes. At the last supper, Jesus took the “dipped sop” (broken *matzah*) and gave it to Judas, indicating he would be the betrayer (John 13:21-27).

**The dinner – lamb, *matzah* and herbs.** Today it is a much more sumptuous meal than in Old Testament times, with gefilte fish, *matzah* ball soup, glazed chicken, *matzah* nut stuffing, potato kugel, honeyed carrots, stewed fruit, and sponge cake. After the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., lamb was no longer the central part of the feast.

**The *afikomen*.** The broken and hidden half of the *matzah* is now discovered by children who are sent to find it. Everyone must eat a small piece of the newly discovered unleavened bread. The three loaves of *matzah* were not part of the early Passover celebration; they came during the early days of the church when the lamb was no longer central to the meal. They picture the Trinity and, specifically, the broken, buried and resurrected body of Christ.

**The third cup – the cup of redemption.** This cup celebrates the promise of God: “I will redeem you.” It is at this point in the upper room that Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper (the “cup after supper” Luke 22:20). A child is sent to the door to look for Elijah who, Scripture says, must come before Messiah. There is much anticipation of the Messiah associated with Passover.

**The fourth cup – the cup of acceptance or praise.** This cup celebrates the promise of God: “I will take you as My people.” Jesus said He would not drink this cup until He drank it new with His disciples in the Kingdom (Matt. 26:29). His acceptance by Israel would not come until much later.

**Closing hymn (Matt. 26:30).** Passover is a joyous time, and many songs are voiced enthusiastically. Often, the latter half of the *Hallel* (Ps. 115-118) would be sung.

## The Fulfillment

To show His fulfillment as the Lamb of God (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Peter 1:18-19), and to memorialize His coming death, Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper during the feast of Passover (Matt. 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-23; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). Just as faithful Jews have observed the Passover for 3,500 years, Christians have observed the memorial meal of the Lord’s Supper since that night 2,000 years ago in the upper room.

*Next: The Feast of Unleavened Bread*

## The Feast of Unleavened Bread

Name	Scriptures	Time / Date	Purpose	Fulfillment
Unleavened Bread	Ex. 12:15-20, 13:3-10; Lev. 23:6-8; Num. 28:17-25; Deut. 16:3-8	15 <sup>th</sup> day of Nisan (March/April); continues for seven days	To commemorate the hardships of Israel's escape from Egypt	<b><u>Sanctification:</u></b> Christ's burial; His body did not suffer decay (John 6:30-59; 1 Cor. 11:24)

### Background

The Feast of Unleavened Bread, also known as *Hag HaMatzah*, is a reminder to the Jew of God's miraculous deliverance from Egyptian bondage. When the Jews fled captivity in the middle of the night, they were instructed to take only unleavened bread because there was no time for bread dough to rise (Ex. 12:39; Deut. 16:3). The Feast of Unleavened Bread is a seven-day holiday, beginning the day after Passover. Together, Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are sometimes called the "Eight Days of Passover" in Scripture.

Unleavened Bread is the first of three annual pilgrim feasts. For each of these feasts – the other two are Weeks and Tabernacles – all Jewish men were required to present themselves before the Lord in the Temple (Ex. 23:14-17, 34:18-23; Deut. 16:16; 2 Chron. 8:13). At age 12, Jesus traveled to Jerusalem for this feast and confounded the scholars with His understanding of Scripture (Luke 2:41-50).

### The Biblical Observance

To properly prepare for the feast, leaven, or yeast, must be removed from the house and no leaven is to be eaten until the feast has ended seven days later (Ex. 12:15, 13:7; Deut. 16:4). In addition, this feast is considered a "high Sabbath," with an extra Sabbath besides the weekly Sabbath. No work is to be done the first day or the seventh day of the feast (Ex. 12:16). Finally, this feast is declared a memorial to be kept forever (Ex. 12:17).

## The Modern Observance

Preparation for Unleavened Bread begins 30 days ahead of time. Walls are washed and painted, cooking utensils scalded, clothing washed and pockets turned inside out, carpets cleaned, and special dishes brought out. The women of the house begin removing all leaven, also known as *chametz*, from the house – even toothpaste if it has baking soda in it. According to Scripture, the Passover may not be celebrated if there is leaven in the house.

However, the woman of the house leaves 10 small pieces of bread with leaven hidden in various rooms. On the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan, the night before Passover, the man of the house lights a candle, and takes a wooden spoon, feather and paper bag and searches the house until he has found all 10 pieces of bread. He uses the feather to whisk the bread onto the wooden spoon, and then dumps the bread from the spoon into the paper bag. The bag is then taken outside and burned. Afterwards, he says the following prayer: “Any *chametz* which is in my possession which I did not see, and remove, nor know about, shall be nullified and become ownerless, like the dust of the earth.”

With that work completed, the family is ready to celebrate Passover and Unleavened Bread, with special worship services on the first and seventh days.

The household search for leaven represents the Messiah. For example:

- The candle symbolizes the Word of God (Jesus), who is the Light of the World.
- The feather represents the Holy Spirit, directing us to the cross.
- The wooden spoon represents the cross, upon which Jesus, who knew no sin, became sin for us.
- The paper bag represents the grave.
- The fire represents the full judgment of our sins.

## Fulfillment

Leaven is a picture of sin in the Bible (Matt. 16:6-12; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1; Gal. 5:9). Leaven permeates the dough, contaminates it, and swells it to many times its size. The fermentation process operates because of the curse of death decreed by God when Adam sinned. That’s why only unleavened bread was used in the Temple (Lev. 2:11).

Unleavened bread is a wonderful picture of Jesus the Messiah. The bread is without leaven, as He is without sin. It also is striped and pierced, as His body was beaten and pierced for our sins (Isa. 53:5; 1 Peter 2:24). In addition, the Feast of Unleavened Bread symbolizes Jesus' burial. His body was placed in the grave but did not see corruption as He rose on the third day (see Psalm 16:10; Isa. 53:9; Matt. 27:57-60, 28:1-10) and carried our sins away (Psalm 103:12; Heb. 9:26).

There are other symbolic markers in this feast:

- Jesus referred to Himself as the bread of life (John 6:35) and chose the bread of the Passover to be the symbolic memorial of His broken body (Luke 22:19).
- Jesus was born in Bethlehem, which means “house of bread.”
- The Lord expects believers to put aside sin in our lives, as leaven is put aside during this feast (1 Cor. 5:7-8; see also Eph. 4:22-24 and Gal. 5:16-24).
- The seven days speak of satisfaction or fullness; believers are completely satisfied in Christ.

In summary, Passover and Unleavened Bread together picture the sacrificial, substitutionary death of Jesus – the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world – and the burial of His body, which God the Father raised on the third day before it decayed. The resurrection, as we'll see next week, is pictured in the Feast of Firstfruits.

*Next: The Feast of Firstfruits*

# The Feast of Firstfruits

Name	Scriptures	Time / Date	Purpose	Fulfillment
Firstfruits	Lev. 23:9-14	16 <sup>th</sup> day of Nisan (March/April)	To dedicate the firstfruits of the barley harvest	Christ's bodily resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20-23)

## Background



Firstfruits marks the beginning of the cereal grain harvests in Israel. Of the crops sown in winter, barley is the first grain to ripen. For the Feast of Firstfruits, a sheaf (a bundle of stalks tied together) of barley is harvested and brought to the Temple as a thanksgiving offering to the Lord. It represents the entire barley harvest and serves as a pledge that the rest of the harvest will be brought in. Keep in mind that Passover occurs on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan; Unleavened Bread begins on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan and goes for seven days; and Firstfruits takes place on the 16<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan.

Firstfruits is seen primarily as a time marker. It marks the beginning of the grain harvest in Israel. It also marks the countdown to the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), which is celebrated 50 days after Firstfruits. As a result, this period of time is known as the *Sefirat Ha-Omer* (“the counting of the omer”) because of the ritual of counting the days from Firstfruits to Pentecost.

## The Biblical Observance

The **regulations** for Firstfruits (Lev. 23:9-14):

- A sheaf of barley is to be brought to the priest at the Temple. He waves the sheaf before the Lord for acceptance.
- Accompanying sacrifices are to be brought as well: an unblemished male lamb of the first year, a drink offering of wine, and a meal offering of barley flour mixed with olive oil.
- The people are forbidden to use any part of the harvest in any way until after they offer their firstfruits to the Lord.

The **ritual** for Firstfruits (Deut. 26:1-11):

- Firstfruits is to be observed, “When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance ...” (v. 1).
- The firstfruits are to be brought to the priest and the giver is to say, “Today I acknowledge to the Lord your God that I have entered the land the Lord swore to our fathers to give us” (v. 3).

- The priest takes the firstfruits and places them before the altar at the tabernacle (later the Temple), and the giver recites the story of God's deliverance of the Jews from Egypt and the giving of the Promised Land (vv. 4-10).
- The giver then bows down and worships the Lord (v. 10).
- The giver joins the priest and even the foreign resident among the people in rejoicing in all the good things the Lord has given him and his household (v. 11).

In Scripture, both the *nation* and the *family* observe Firstfruits.

#### **For the nation:**

- A special barley crop is raised just outside Jerusalem in the Ashes Valley. Just before Passover, representatives of the Sanhedrin, Israel's ruling religious body, mark off part of this field and designate it as firstfruits.
- At sundown on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan (the start of the 16<sup>th</sup> day), a three-man delegation from the Sanhedrin leads a multitude of observers to the barley field with sickles and baskets. They reap one *ephah* (about 3/5 bushel) from the designated firstfruits and bring the grain back to the Temple.
- On the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> day, one *omer* (about two quarts) of the barley flour is mixed with ¾ pint of olive oil, with a small amount of frankincense sprinkled on it. The priest then waves it before the Lord as Lev. 23:11-13 instructs and burns a small amount on the altar. The rest is given to the Levites.

#### **For the family:**

- Each family marks out the firstfruits of its barley harvest, usually with a cord, and on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> day brings the firstfruits to the Temple, along with a lamb or, if the family is poor, two turtledoves or young pigeons for a burnt offering. The man who brings these – the head of the household – might say with great feeling, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord."
- As the priest holds the lamb or the turtledoves, the man confesses his sins, and then the priest, in accordance with Lev. 1:10-17, kills the sacrificial animal(s).
- Standing face-to-face with the priest, the man repeats the familiar Firstfruits prayer: "Today I acknowledge to the Lord your God that I have entered the land the Lord swore to our fathers to give us" (Deut. 26:3).
- The man then hands the priest a basket containing the *omer* of barley as his Firstfruits offering. The priest places his hands under the basket and slowly waves it before the Lord as the offering bearer continues his prayer: "My father was a wandering Aramean. He went down to Egypt with a few people and lived there. There he became a great, powerful, and populous nation. He led us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. I have now brought the first of the land's produce that you, Lord, have given me" (Deut. 26:5, 9-10).

- The priest then takes a handful of the grain and tosses it into the fire. The offering bearer falls on his face and worships the Lord.
- With the requirements now fulfilled, the man rejoins his family.

## The Modern Observance

The sacrifices and offerings of Firstfruits are not offered today since there is no Temple. The only surviving ritual is the counting of the *omer*, the days from Firstfruits to the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost).

## The Fulfillment

Jesus rose from the dead on the third day of Passover season (Nisan 16), on the day of Firstfruits, completing the prophetic picture the spring feasts painted of His work of redemption: death (Passover), burial (Unleavened Bread) and resurrection (Firstfruits).

Paul proclaims in 1 Cor. 15:20-22: “But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man [Adam], the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man [Jesus]. For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.”

As Kevin Howard and Marvin Rosenthal point out, “The resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee and the beginning (firstfruits) of the final harvest, or resurrection, of all mankind. The Messiah fulfilled the prophetic meaning of this holy day by rising from the dead to become the firstfruits of the resurrection, and He did it on the very day of Firstfruits.” (*The Feasts of the Lord: God’s Prophetic Calendar from Calvary to the Kingdom*, p. 86)

***Next: The Feast of Weeks (Pentecost or Shavuot)***

# The Feast of Pentecost (*Shavuot*)

Name	Scriptures	Time / Date	Purpose	Fulfillment
Pentecost	Lev. 23:15-22; Num. 28:26-31; Deut. 16:9-12	50 days after Firstfruits (May/June)	To dedicate the firstfruits of the wheat harvest	The outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2)

## Background



Scripture uses three names to identify the feast many Christians today know as Pentecost (*Shavuot* in Hebrew):

- *Hag Hashavuot*, meaning “the Feast of Weeks” (Ex. 34:22; Deut. 16:10; 2 Chron. 8:13). It’s called the Feast of Weeks because seven weeks were counted from the Feast of Firstfruits until this feast.
- *Yom Habikkurim*, or “the Day of Firstfruits” (Num. 28:26). This is the day in which the firstfruit offerings of the summer wheat crop were brought to the Temple. This day marked the beginning of the summer wheat harvest, while the Feast of Firstfruits marked the beginning of the spring barley harvest.
- *Hag Hakatzir*, or “the Feast of Harvest” (Ex. 23:16). This feast marked the beginning of the summer harvest season.

In the Greek language, *Shavuot* was known as Pentecost, meaning “fiftieth,” since it was celebrated 50 days after the Feast of Firstfruits.

## The Biblical Observance

Three Scripture passages outline the biblical observance of *Shavuot*. Lev. 23:15-22 and Num. 28:26-31 describe the Temple offerings, and Deut. 16:9-12 outlines the requirements for individual worshippers.

Like the feasts of Unleavened Bread and Tabernacles, *Shavuot* was one of three “solemn feasts” decreed by the Lord (Ex. 23:14-17; Deut. 16:16; 2 Chron. 8:13). All Israelite men were obligated to present themselves at the Temple. The Temple services for *Shavuot* closely resembled those of the Feast of Firstfruits, since both holy days were observed with firstfruit offerings. However, the offering for *Shavuot* was different. It consisted of two long loaves of wheat bread with leaven in them, as the Lord commanded: “Bring two loaves of bread from your settlements as a presentation offering, each of them made from four quarts of fine flour, baked with yeast, as firstfruits to the Lord” (Lev. 23:17).

The loaves of bread were not burned because God had forbidden leaven on the altar (Lev. 2:11). Instead, these loaves with yeast in them, along with two lambs, formed the wave offering for *Shavuot*. The priest waved them in front of the altar forwards and backwards, and then up and down. After that, they were set aside “for the priest” (Lev. 23:20) and became the festive meal the priests ate later that day in the Temple.

## The Modern Observance

After Roman troops destroyed the Jewish Temple in 70 A.D., many of the feasts changed, since the Temple had been the focal point of the spring and fall festivals. In 140 A.D., the Sanhedrin decided to change the emphasis of *Shavuot* away from agriculture and onto the giving of the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Although the Bible does not associate *Shavuot* with Sinai, the giving of the law occurred in the third month (Ex. 19:1), so there was some justification for the decision. *Shavuot* became known as *Zeman Mattan Toreatenu*, “the Time of the Giving of Our Law.”

Today, it is customary to decorate synagogues with flowers and greenery for *Shavuot*. This reminds Jews that Firstfruits is a harvest festival and, according to tradition, Mt. Sinai once was covered with grass and trees. Key Scriptures are from Ezekiel 1:1-28 and 3:12; and Habakkuk 2:20-3:19. These passages describe the brightness of God’s glory. After *Shavuot* was refocused on the giving of the law, Exodus 19-20 and the Book of Ruth were added to the festival’s readings. In addition, many synagogues hold *Shavuot* confirmation services for teenagers to celebrate completion of their childhood studies and their commitment to observe the Mosaic Law.

Dairy foods are traditional *Shavuot* fare. This is because, the rabbis say, the law is like milk and honey to the soul. Among the dishes are cheesecakes, cheese blintzes, and cheese *kreplach*. The blintzes are cheese rolled into pancakes the fried in a skillet. The *kreplach* are dough pockets stuffed with cheese. It is also customary to bake two loaves of *hallah* bread. They represent the two loaves of bread offered in the Temple and the two tablets received on Mt. Sinai.

It’s also customary for observant Jews to stay up all night studying and discussing the Torah. They study the opening and closing verses of each Sabbath reading, the opening and closing verses of each book of the Bible, and the entire book of Ruth, with breaks throughout the night for coffee and cheesecake.

## The Fulfillment

Acts 2 records the fulfillment of *Shavuot* as the promised Holy Spirit descends, indwells believers and ushers in the church age. Key points to remember are:

- Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would come and live in believers' hearts (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7), and He said it would happen soon after His ascension (Acts 1:4-5).
- The Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost as Jews from all over the world gathered in Israel (Acts 2:5). They heard the sound of a rushing, mighty wind and came together to investigate it (Acts 2:6). In this way, God began to use believers, indwelled by the Holy Spirit, to be His witnesses, beginning in Jerusalem (Acts 1:8). The 3,000 saved on the Day of Pentecost were Jews.
- While unleavened bread symbolizes Jesus' sinless humanity (Luke 22:19), the two loaves used at *Shavuot* / Pentecost contain yeast and symbolize that the Body of Christ (the church) would be made up of sinners.
- The two loaves used at *Shavuot* also symbolize Jews and Gentiles, demonstrating the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham to bless all the nations through him (Gen. 12:3; see Gal. 3:26-28).
- Just as faithful Jews brought the firstfruits of their wheat harvest to the Temple on *Shavuot*, so the 3,000 Jewish believers on the Day of Pentecost were the firstfruits of the church.
- One of Jesus' parables about the kingdom of heaven refers to wheat and tares – a message that the true church, like wheat, would exist along with false professors of the faith, like tares, until Christ returns and separates them (Matt. 13:24-30; 34-43).

***Next week: The Feast of Trumpets***

# The Feast of Trumpets (*Rosh Hashanah*)

Name	Scriptures	Time / Date	Purpose	Fulfillment
Trumpets	Lev. 23:23-25; Num. 10:10, 29:1-6	1 <sup>st</sup> day of Tishri (September/October)	To usher in the seventh month and begin “The Days of Awe.”	The rapture of the church (1 Cor. 15:51-2; 1 Thess. 4:16-17)

## Background

In Scripture, Rosh Hashanah is referred to as *Zikhron Teruah* (“Memorial of Blowing [of trumpets],” Lev. 23:24) and *Yom Teruah* (“Day of Blowing [of trumpets],” Num. 29:1). Because of these biblical descriptions, Rosh Hashanah is often referred to as “the Feast of Trumpets.” It is a day of sounding trumpets in the Temple and throughout Israel. Rosh Hashanah literally means “head of the year.” This holiday marks the first day of the Jewish civil New Year. However, this designation only came to be after the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. Since there was no longer a central place of worship and an altar of sacrifice – the Temple in Jerusalem – the observance necessarily had to change. Today, the emphasis is on the Jewish New Year rather than the blowing of trumpets.

## The Biblical Observance

The Scripture references to the Feast of Trumpets are simple and straightforward:

- Israel is commanded to memorialize the day by blowing trumpets and by keeping the day as a Sabbath of rest (Lev. 23:23-25; Num. 29:1).
- A special burnt offering, consisting of a young bull, a ram, and seven lambs, is offered. A kid goat also is sacrificed as a sin offering. These offerings are in addition to the required daily sacrifices (Num. 28:1-8) and those for the new moon, which also are offered on that day (Num. 28:11-15).

Rosh Hashanah is the only Jewish holiday occurring on the first day of the month, when the moon appears as a thin crescent. Just as the seventh day and the seventh year are holy according to Mosaic law (Ex. 20:8-10; Lev. 25:4), so is the seventh month, Tishri, the Sabbath of months. Jews in ancient Israel announced the new moon with short blasts of a trumpet, but the new moon of Tishri was announced with long blasts, setting it apart.

The type of horn used for the Feast of Trumpets is the *shofar*, a curved trumpet made from a ram's horn. This is different from the *hatzotzerah*, the silver trumpets priests blew to announce the beginning and ending of the Sabbath, and with the sacrifices. During the Feast of Trumpets, a priest is chosen to sound the *shofar*. He stands in a row of priests with silver trumpets facing the altar. The *shofar* sounds long blasts while the silver trumpets sound short blasts over the sacrifices of the day.

Besides the sacrificial ceremony, the trumpet had many uses for Israel:

- To gather an assembly before the Lord (Num. 10:2-4).
- To sound a battle alarm (Num. 10:9).
- To announce the coronation of a new king in the cases of Solomon (1 Kings 1:34, 39), Jehu (2 Kings 9:13), Joash (2 Kings 11:12-14), and Absalom (2 Sam. 15:10).

## The Modern Observance

The observance of Rosh Hashanah today bears little resemblance to the biblical Feast of Trumpets.

**The Days of Awe.** Jewish tradition holds that the 10 days from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur are the “Days of Awe.” It is believed that God reviews the books of judgment on Rosh Hashanah and delivers final judgment on Yom Kippur. These 10 days are considered the last chance for a person to repent before God’s judgment falls, possibly resulting in the death of the disobedient in the coming year. It is believed that three books are opened and every person’s name is entered into one of the books:

- The Book of Life for the wicked. If a person’s name is entered here, judgment is final and that person’s life will be cut short in the coming year.
- The Book of Life for the righteous. Those whose names are entered here are granted another year of life and prosperity.
- The Book of Life for the in-between. Those whose names are written here have their lives hanging in the balance. If they sincerely repent during the Days of Awe, tradition holds that God will grant them life until the following Yom Kippur.

There is a Biblical origin of this tradition (Ex. 32:32-33; Psalm 69:28), but Jewish tradition has greatly embellished it. The Days of Awe are so solemn, weddings and other festive occasions are postponed until after Yom Kippur.

**Prayers of repentance.** Faithful Jews recite penitent prayers called *selihot* (“forgiveness”) throughout the week leading up to Rosh Hashanah.

**The casting ceremony.** On the afternoon of the first day of Rosh Hashanah, observant Jews gather near a body of water to recite the *Tashlikh* (“cast off”) prayer. In Israel, this may take place on the beaches of the Mediterranean Sea or at the Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem. Several Hebrew Scriptures make up the prayer – Micah 7:18-20; Psalm 118:5-9; Psalm 33; Psalm 130; and often Isaiah 11:9. After the prayer, worshipers may shake their pockets, or throw bread crumbs or stones into the water, symbolically ridding themselves of sins.

**The sounding of the *shofar*.** Jewish tradition holds that on Rosh Hashanah, Satan appears before God to accuse Israel as God opens the books for judgment. The Jews blast the *shofar* on this day to confuse Satan, so he might believe Messiah has come and ended Satan’s reign on earth. It is customary to sound 100 *shofar* blasts on each day of the Rosh Hashanah synagogue services.

Synagogue services for Rosh Hashanah are lengthy, lasting five or more hours, and are focused on God’s kingship. The prayers and readings emphasize God’s majesty, His remembrance of His everlasting covenant with Israel, and the key role of the *shofar* in the history of the nation. The benediction speaks of the end of days, in which God will reveal Himself, sounding the *shofar* and sending the promised Messiah (Zech. 9:14).

**The Jewish New Year.** Rosh Hashanah has its festive moments as well. Since it is identified as the start of the civil New Year, Jews often send festive cards to family and friends, wishing them *Shanah tovah*, “a good year.” They also dress in new clothing and eat special foods, like apples dipped in honey and oval loaves of *hallah* bread; the round loaves of bread remind them of crowns and God’s kingship.

The Talmud, the ancient rabbinical commentary, suggests the world was created in the month of Tishri. Other rabbinic authorities say Rosh Hashanah was the day on which man was created.

## The Fulfillment

Israel’s four springtime feasts – Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits and Pentecost – were fulfilled in the first coming of the Messiah. The three fall festivals – Rosh Hashanah, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles – will be fulfilled at the Messiah’s second coming.

For Israel, the fulfillment of the Feast of Trumpets will be a dark day. Just as Rosh Hashanah occurs at the new moon, when the sky is darkest, Israel’s prophets warn of a coming day of judgment for the nation. For example, Amos 5:18-20, Zeph. 1:14-16, and Joel 2:31 all speak of the day in which the Lord will turn off the heavenly lights, pour out His wrath on the wicked, and bring Israel to repentance and into the new covenant.

Ancient Jewish tradition held that the resurrection of the dead would occur on Rosh Hashanah. As a result, many Jewish grave markers feature a *shofar*.

God's last trump and the resurrection of the dead are tied to the rapture of the church in the New Testament. Consider these key passages:

- 1 Cor. 15:51-52 – “Listen! I am telling you a mystery: We will not all fall asleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed.”
- 1 Thess. 4:16-17 – “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are still alive will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will always be with the Lord.”

Remember the reasons for trumpet blasts in the Old Testament? They will be the same in the days to come:

- To gather an assembly before the Lord (the rapture of the church).
- To sound a battle alarm (God will defeat Satan's rebellious followers throughout the tribulation and at Christ's return).
- To announce the coronation of a new king (Jesus the Messiah will sit on the throne of David as King of kings and Lord of lords).

***Next week: The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)***

\* While several sources were used in preparing these notes, I drew heavily from *The Feasts of the Lord: God's Prophetic Calendar from Calvary to the Kingdom* by Kevin Howard and Marvin Rosenthal.

# The Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*)

Name	Scriptures	Time / Date	Purpose	Fulfillment
Day of Atonement	Lev. 23:26-32; Num. 29:7-11	10 <sup>th</sup> day of Tishri (September/October)	To make annual atonement for sins.	The crucifixion and Israel's repentance at the return of Christ.

## Background

Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement, is Israel's most solemn holy day. *Kippur* is derived from the Hebrew word *kaphar*, which means "to cover." On Yom Kippur, atonement is made for the previous year's sins by the priests and people through the sacrifice of spotless and innocent animals. The event takes place in the fall, on the 10<sup>th</sup> day after the Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah) and completes the "Days of Awe," the 10-day period of self-examination and reconciliation from Trumpets to Atonement.

God designated Yom Kippur as a day in which "you must practice self-denial" (Lev. 23:27, 32). It is a day of fasting and repenting of sins for the previous year. It is such a vital day that God said the person who refuses to devote himself to fasting and repentance "must be cut off from his people" (Lev. 23:29). In addition, all forms of work are prohibited. Those who ignore this command are to be put to death (Lev. 23:30).

Yom Kippur is an especially significant day for Israel's priesthood. On this day only, the high priest enters the Holy of Holies and stands in the presence of God's glory. Many animal sacrifices are offered on this day. Besides the daily burnt offerings with their required grain and drink offerings, additional offerings are made, including a bull, a ram and seven lambs for the people, and a ram for the priesthood (Num. 29:7-11).

## The Biblical Observance

The high priest normally does not perform the Temple sacrifices, but during the week leading up to Yom Kippur, he serves beside the priests, and on the Day of Atonement performs all of the services alone. He stays the entire week before Yom Kippur in the Temple area, and is sprinkled twice with the ashes of a heifer to make sure he has not somehow become unclean by touching a dead body (Num. 19:1-13).

**The morning service.** Even though the Jewish day begins at sunset, the Temple service for Yom Kippur does not take place until dawn the next morning. The high priest, who normally washes his hands and feet before serving in the Temple, on this day totally submerges himself in a special bath behind a large linen curtain where only the shadow of his movements may be seen. He then dresses in his high priestly garments: a purple robe hemmed with small golden bells, and the golden breastplate studded with 12 precious stones as a reminder that he represents the 12 tribes of Israel. Then, the high priest washes his hands and feet and conducts the morning service. He returns later, washes his hands and feet again, bathes again, and dresses in his white linen clothing for Yom Kippur. In all, the high priest bathes and changes clothing five times, and offers 15 blood sacrifices, on Yom Kippur.

**The afternoon service.** This service is central to the observance of Yom Kippur, as atonement is made for the priests and the people. It begins as the high priest places his hands on a young bull, as a sign of identification with his substitute, and confesses his sins. Three times during his confession, he pronounces the covenant name of the Lord (*YHWH* – *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*), and each time the priests and the people fall on the faces and say, “Blessed be His name whose glorious kingdom is forever and ever.”

Next, two priests – the deputy high priest and the chief priest of the division of priests chosen to minister that week – escort the high priest to the eastern side of the altar, where two identical goats await. The high priest casts lots for the goats. One is determined to be “for YHWH” and the other is “for *azazel*.” Together, the two goats constitute a single sin offering for the Lord. The goat “for *azazel*” is immediately marked with a red woolen strip tied to one of his horns. The goat “for YHWH” is left facing a stone altar where he will soon shed his blood. There is some debate about the meaning of *azazel*. Some believe it’s either a term for Satan, a demon who lives in the desert, or a pagan god in the form of a goat, while others contend that the term comes from the Hebrew word *azel*, which carries the idea of “escape.”

The high priest returns to the bull a second time, placing his hands on the animal’s head and confessing the sins of the priesthood. He then slaughters the bull and collects its blood in a golden bowl. An attending priest stirs the blood so it will not congeal.

Next, the high priest takes live coals from the altar and two handfuls of incense and makes his way through the thick veil that separates the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. Inside, he pours the incense onto the coals and waits for a fragrant cloud of smoke to fill the room so that he will not see God face to face and die. In Solomon’s Temple, the Ark of the Covenant was in the Holy of Holies and the Shekinah glory of God rested above it. After the Babylonian captivity, the Ark was never recovered. The Holy of Holies was an empty room except for a single stone, called the foundation stone, projecting about two inches above the floor.

The high priest leaves the Holy of Holies momentarily, returning with the golden bowl of bull's blood. He sprinkles the blood in front of the altar – once upwards and seven times downward. Then he again leaves the Holy of Holies and places the golden bowl on a golden stand.

He sacrifices the goat “for YHWH,” collects the blood in another golden bowl and enters the Holy of Holies for a third time, sprinkling the goat's blood the same way he has sprinkled the bull's blood – always counting aloud to prevent errors. After, he sprinkles the outside of the veil with the bull's blood, then the goat's blood, and finally he mixes the bull's blood and the goat's blood and sprinkles the horns of the altar in the courtyard.

Now the attention focuses on the remaining goat – the one “for *azazel*.” The high priest places his hands on the goat's head and confesses the sins of the people. The “scapegoat” is then led by a priest 10-12 miles into the wilderness and released, never to be seen again. Some Bible commentators say that in the days of the second Temple, the priest would lead the goat to the edge of a rocky ledge and push him off so that he plunged to his death; if this is so, it is more than God required, for He commanded that the goat be released. In any case, the goat, symbolically carrying the sins of the people, could not be allowed to return. While this is happening, the high priest finishes sacrificing the bull and the goat on the altar. Then he addresses the people, reading the Yom Kippur passages from Leviticus and Numbers. Last, the high priest offers burnt offerings on the altar.

One last time, the high priest enters the Holy of Holies to remove the fire pan and incense ladle. He bathes and changes into his golden garments just as the cool autumn night approaches.

## The Modern Observance

Yom Kippur today bears little resemblance to the biblical observance, primarily because after the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. there was no longer a prescribed place to offer the sacrifices. A leading rabbi in Jerusalem at that time, Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, led the nation to abandon atonement through blood sacrifice in favor of *mitzvot*, or good works. As a result, human traditions have replaced biblical practices in the observance of this feast.

Synagogue services are the focus of Yom Kippur today. These services draw huge crowds, much like Easter services in Christian churches. The synagogue is decorated in white and adorned with white flowers to symbolize cleansing from sin, and worshipers even wear white as a reminder of the white linen the priests wore on this High Holy Day.

In very orthodox circles, the tradition of *Kaparot* is observed. It involves the killing of an innocent animal, normally a chicken, to atone for sin.

## The Fulfillment

The Day of Atonement foreshadows two significant events: Jesus' sacrificial death, and Israel's repentance at the Messiah's return. "They will look at Me whom they pierced" and repent, the Lord declares in Zech. 12:10. God will deal with the nation's sins and remember them no more (Isa. 43:25; Jer. 31:34). Isaiah prophesied that the nation would be born spiritually in a day (Isa. 66:8; Rom. 11:26-27). This will be the prophetic fulfillment of the Day of Atonement as Israel comes face to face with its Messiah at the end of Daniel's "70<sup>th</sup> week" (Dan. 9:24-27), a seven-year tribulation period that begins with the rise of an evil world ruler known in Jewish theology as Armilus and in Christian theology as Antichrist. Throughout the tribulation, many Jews will turn to Christ in the midst of great persecution, acknowledge Him as Lord and receive Him as Savior. At the same time, God will pour out His wrath on a wicked and Godless world. At the end, perhaps on the very Day of Atonement, the Jews will receive their Messiah as He comes in power and great glory as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Note the similarities between the work of the high priest on the Day of Atonement and the work of Jesus in His sacrificial death:

- The high priest does all of the work – offering 15 blood sacrifices, lighting the candles, etc. Jesus, our "great high priest" (Heb. 4:14), did all the work of redemption so that salvation is by grace alone through faith (Eph. 2:8-9).
- The high priest humbles himself, wearing simple white linen clothing. Jesus humbled Himself by becoming a man (Phil. 2:5-8).
- The high priest must be spotless, having his sin atoned for before he may enter the presence of God behind the veil. Jesus was sinless (2 Cor. 5:21).
- The high priest enters the Holy of Holies only once a year, taking the atoning blood of bulls and goats behind the veil into the presence of God. Jesus offered His own blood once and for all, and the veil of the Temple – symbolizing the separation between holy God and sinful man as well as representing the body of Christ – was torn in two (Matt. 27:51).
- The blood the high priest takes into the Holy of Holies can only cover sin. Jesus' death at Calvary took away sin (Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 25-28; 10:4; John 1:29).

In addition to the high priest, the goats also foreshadow the work of Messiah. Both goats have to be spotless, as Jesus was sinless. The goat "for YHWH," whose blood is shed, symbolizes the substitutionary death of the Messiah. The goat "for *azazel*" symbolizes the finished work of Jesus in taking away our sins, never to be remembered again. Just as the high priest takes the blood of the goat "for YHWH" into the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the people, Jesus entered the heavenly Holy of Holies with His own blood as the once and final payment for our sins.

In Lev. 25:8-17, God gives instructions for the Year of Jubilee (every 50<sup>th</sup> year). He tells the Jews to sound the trumpet on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh month, which is the Day of Atonement. Why not the first day of the seventh month – or, for that matter, the first day of the first month to mark the beginning of this special year? The reason becomes clear when we see the results of the Day of Atonement. In the Year of Jubilee, land reverts to its original owner, slaves are set free, all debts are cancelled, and the land rests. What a marvelous picture of the results of Christ's sacrificial death. Jesus cancelled our sin debt, redeemed us out of the slave market of sin and set us free, promised us a place in heaven, and gave us rest. The sorrowful self-denial of Atonement is turned to joy as Jesus, the Lamb of God, invites us to enter His rest.

*Next: the Feast of Tabernacles*

## The Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*)

Name	Scriptures	Time / Date	Purpose	Fulfillment
Tabernacles	Lev. 23:33-43; Num. 29:12-39; Deut. 16:13-17, 31:10-13	15 <sup>th</sup> – 21 <sup>st</sup> of Tishri, with an 8 <sup>th</sup> day added as a climax to all the feasts (September/October).	To commemorate God's protection during the wilderness wanderings and to rejoice in the harvest.	<b><u>Restoration:</u></b> The peace and prosperity of God's Kingdom on earth.

### Background



The Feast of Tabernacles, or Sukkot, is the seventh and final feast God gave Israel. It is the most festive of all the feasts and is mentioned more often in scripture than any of the others. The word *sukkot* in Hebrew is translated “tabernacles” in English and means booths or huts. Throughout this seven-day feast, the Jews are required to live in temporary shelters to remind them of God’s provision during their 40 years of wilderness wandering. The holiday also is called the Feast of Ingathering (Ex. 23:16; 34:22) because it is observed after all the fall crops are harvested. This happy feast commemorates God’s past provision in the desert and His present goodness in providing the fall harvest.

The feast begins on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of Tishri (September/October), five days after the Day of Atonement. The first day of Tabernacles and the day after Tabernacles (known as *Shemini Atzeret*) are sacred assemblies, or Sabbaths. No work is permitted on these days. This is one of three pilgrim feasts, along with Unleavened Bread and Weeks (Pentecost), requiring all Jewish males to appear before the Lord in the Temple.

### The Biblical Observance

Four passages of scripture outline the observance of Tabernacles: Lev. 23:33-43; Num. 29:12-39; Deut. 16:13-17, and Deut. 31:10-13. A great number of sacrifices are required each day: one goat, 14 lambs, two rams, and a number of bulls – 13 on the first day, then decreasing by one each day. In addition, the accompanying meal offerings and drink offerings are presented. The work is so intense that all 24 divisions of priests help carry out the sacrificial duties.

It is during the Feast of Tabernacles that Solomon dedicated Israel's first Temple. The Shekinah glory of God descended from heaven to light the fire on the altar and to fill the Holy of Holies (2 Chron. 5:3; 7:1-4).

Jewish pilgrims from around the world travel to Jerusalem for this feast. They build booths, or huts, in which they live for one week – all carefully located within a Sabbath day's journey (a little more than half a mile) of the Temple. At sundown, the ram's horn (*shofar*) blasts and the celebration begins as fires from thousands of Jewish camps blaze in a half-mile radius around the Temple.

**Water-libation ceremony.** Israel's rainy season is from November through March. Tabernacles gratefully acknowledges the harvest and, at least in part, beseeches God for the coming moisture necessary for future harvests. So each morning of the feast, the high priest pours a pitcher of water from the Pool of Siloam into a special basin in the inner court of the Temple as a visual prayer for rain. At the same time, a drink offering of wine is poured into another basin. Three blasts of a silver trumpet follow, and the people listen as the Levites sing the *Hallel* (Ps. 113-118). The congregation waves palm branches toward the altar and join in singing Psalm 118:25: "Lord, save us! Lord, please grant us success!"

Psalm 118 is a messianic psalm and gives the feast a messianic focus. Centuries after this Psalm was penned, the crowds in Jerusalem greet Jesus with shouts of *Hosanna* ("save now") and wave palm branches as He enters the city triumphantly (Matt. 21:8-9; Luke 19:37-38; John 12:12-13). This imagery continues in heaven where the saints worship around the throne with palm branches in hand (Rev. 7:9-10).

**Temple-lighting ceremony.** On the second night of Tabernacles, the people gather in the spacious outer court of the Temple known as the Court of the Women. Four towering lamp stands are in the center of the court, each with four branches of oil lamps. The wicks are made from the worn-out linen garments of the priests, who ascend tall ladders to keep the lamps filled with olive oil. The elders of the Sanhedrin perform torch dances all night long. Levites stand at the top of the 15 steps leading down to the Court of Women. As flutes, trumpets, harps, and other stringed instruments accompany them, they sing the "Fifteen Psalms of Degrees" (Psalms 120-134). With each psalm, they descend one step.

This celebration is repeated every night from the second night to the final night of Tabernacles. The brilliant lights, bathing the Temple and flooding the streets of Jerusalem, remind the Jews of the descent of the Shekinah glory in King Solomon's day as the people look forward to the return of the Shekinah in the days of the Messiah (Ez. 43:1-5).

It is the day after Tabernacles that Jesus proclaims in the Temple, “I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows Me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). Later that day, He heals a blind man and declares, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John 9:5). The Pharisees bristle at both statements. The best they can do is to accuse Him of healing a man on the Sabbath. Incidentally, there are no Mosaic laws against healing on the Sabbath; the tradition of the Pharisees is the only thing Jesus violated.

**Hoshana-Rabbah ceremony.** On the seventh day of the feast, the Temple water-pouring ceremony, which is performed each morning throughout the week, takes on great importance. Jewish tradition holds that it is on this day that God decides whether there will be rain for the next year’s crops. Instead of three silver-trumpet blasts, there are seven sets of three blasts. Rather than one circuit around the altar, the priests make seven circuits. The day is known as the *Hoshana Rabbah*, or “Great Hosanna.”

It is during this ceremony that Jesus stands up and shouts, “If anyone is thirsty, he should come to Me and drink! The one who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within” (John 7:37-38). The Jewish leaders are infuriated; some want to seize Him, but no one lays a hand on Him. A debate ensues among the people, many of whom do not realize, or will not believe, He is the Son of David, born in Bethlehem, the Messiah (John 7:40-44). The chief priests and the Pharisees rebuke the Temple officers, who had the authority to arrest Jesus for disturbing the ceremony, but the officers reply, “No man ever spoke like this” (John 7:46).

## The Modern Observance

The *sukkah*, or tabernacle, is the primary symbol of the feast today. As soon as Yom Kippur is past, observant Jews build rough booths in their yards or on their patios. The booths are three-sided and covered with branches. The roofs are thatched so that there is partial shade in the daytime, and so the stars can be seen through it at night. Throughout the feast, Jewish families eat their meals in the booths, and some even sleep there. These booths remind the Jews of their hastily built housing in the wilderness.

Leviticus 23:40 instructs the Jews to take fruit, palm branches, the boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook and rejoice for seven days. Observant Jews may build their booths with these items, or carry them in their hands as they rejoice, or both.

At the synagogue, congregants circle the building and sing Psalm 118. The Torah scroll, rather than the ancient altar, is the center of the ceremony. Since the destruction of the Temple, the feast is more closely connected to Yom Kippur. Hashanah Rabbah, the last day of the feast, is seen as the last day on which the judgments God declared on Yom Kippur could be reversed, so observant Jews ceremonially beat willow branches on the synagogue pews to remove the leaves, symbolizing repentance and the removal of sin.

## The Fulfillment

The Bible often compares the harvest with God's judgment (Hos. 6:11; Joel 3:13; Matt. 13:39; Rev. 14:14-20). In keeping with this imagery, God designed the Feast of Tabernacles to foreshadow the day in which He will gather His people to Himself and send away the wicked (Mal. 4:1-3). When the Messiah returns and sets up His earthly kingdom, He will bring together Jew and Gentile to worship Him in Jerusalem (Zech. 14:16-17).

Further, the Lord Himself will tabernacle, or pitch His tent, with the redeemed (Ez. 37:27-28; Rev. 21:3). The Shekinah glory will be seen again (Isa. 60:1, 19; Zech. 2:5), covering Mount Zion with a cloud by day and a fire by night (Isa. 4:5-6). God's people will enjoy intimate, face-to-face fellowship with their Savior.

An interesting observation: Some believe Jesus was born during the Feast of Tabernacles, based on scriptural information regarding the timing of John the Baptist's birth. If that's true, it more fully illustrates the truth that Jesus is the Tabernacle of God. John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and took up residence (lit. *and tabernacled* or *and dwelt in a tent*) with us." Col. 2:9 states, "For in Him the entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily." Jesus will again tabernacle with us when He returns in power and great glory.

In another way, the shelters that are built represent the physical bodies in which we temporarily live today – bodies that eagerly await their glorification at the return of Christ (Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 15:51-57; 2 Cor. 5:1-4).

The Old Testament visions of the coming of all nations to worship at Jerusalem refer to the Feast of Tabernacles on the occasion of their pilgrimage (Zech. 14:16-21). This feast speaks of Christ's millennial reign – a new beginning without the ravages of sin. The earth gives bountifully, all animals are docile (Isa. 65:25), armies no longer march against each other, every man sits under his own fig tree (Micah 4:4), and righteousness becomes a lasting reality on the earth. As the Apostle John wrote in Rev. 22:20b: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"

***This concludes our study of the Jesus in the Feasts of Israel.***