



RIVER VALLEY SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

The Old Testament Feasts

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FEASTS AND FESTIVALS OF ISRAEL (חַג, chag; מועד, mo'ed; ἑορτή, heortē). Regularly occurring community events that recognized God's work and presence with His people.

Feasts and festivals were a common component of ancient religious practice. They were celebrations of divine provision or protection. Each major Israelite feast recognized a specific aspect of God's saving work. Since sharing a table signified peace or fellowship, feasts as religious observances demonstrated a peaceful relationship between God and Israel. The most significant texts regarding the feasts of Israel are Lev 23, describing the festivals, Num 28–29, emphasizing the offerings, and Deut 16, emphasizing pilgrimages. In addition to national festivals, Israelites celebrated other occasions such as birthdays, weddings, and agricultural or personal events. These occasions, while more private, were not secular, as each event had a divine blessing.

Sabbath

Sabbaths were the most frequently observed festivals in Israel. They occurred weekly, monthly, every seven years, and every fifty years. Sabbath celebrations were included in the list of Israel's appointed feasts (Lev 23:1–44). The Sabbath Year was more festive than the weekly Sabbath celebration (Lev 25:1–7). The Year of Jubilee, celebrated every 50 years, was an occasion to free slaves and cancel debts (Lev 25:8–55). Each new moon constituted a minor festival—it included feasting, rest from work, and extra sacrifices. While the Sabbath Year and the Jubilee may never have actually been practiced, the new moon celebrations continued throughout Israel's history (see 1 Sam 20:24–27; 1 Chr 23:31; 2 Chr 2:4; 8:13; 31:3; Ezra 3:5; Psa 81:3; Isa 1:13–14; Hos 2:11).

The Levitical Feasts

The most well-known feasts of Israel are those described in Lev 23. The three pilgrimage feasts—the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles—demanded that every male Israelite travel to Jerusalem to worship at the temple.

Paschal Feasts

The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are closely related and ran consecutively (Lev 23:4–8). The Feast of Weeks followed seven weeks later, and connected the remembrance of the exodus (at Passover) with the bounty of the conquest.

Passover. The Passover was established in Exod 12 prior to the Sinai covenant. It is technically non-Levitical, but Levitical statutes expanded regulations for the Passover.

Of all the feasts of Israel, the Passover is the clearest example of God's election and grace. The Passover celebrates God's divine grace and deliverance of the faithful during the time of the exodus, the story of which is recounted during the feast. By "passing over" the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, God allowed the firstborn of Israel to live (Exod 12:21–31). Kline suggests that the emphasis of Passover is not on the passing of God over the Israelites but on His "covering" the Israelites through the blood on the doorpost. This interpretation makes the Passover an atonement feast like the Day of Atonement, and may be contradicted by passages such as Exod 12:12–13 (Kline, "Feast of Cover-Over," 498–500).

Passover was originally celebrated on the 14th day of Abib (which in postexilic times was called Nisan). Initially celebrated within households, the establishment of the temple demanded a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Deut 16:5–7). Passover excluded foreigners and hired help, but circumcised resident aliens could participate (Exod 12:45–49). The feast was austere, and demanded a specific menu and procedure:

- The lamb from the sacrifice was the main course. It was to be roasted by fire and completely consumed (Exod 12:7–10). The lamb was to be treated carefully, and could not have any broken bones (Num 9:12).
- Bitter herbs were served, signifying the bitterness of the Israelites' struggles in Egypt.

- Only unleavened bread could be used. Initially, this was caused by the inability to wait for the bread to rise (Exod 12:39). Later, the absence of leaven represented purity from sin.
- Participants in the Passover feast were to be fully dressed for travel, anticipating God's deliverance (Exod 12:11).

The Passover meal was later expanded to include:

- Spring greens dipped into a cup of salt water, representing the passage through the Red Sea (salt water) and entrance into the land (spring greens).
- Roasted eggs to symbolize a peace offering for the temple.
- Charoset, which is made from chopped fruit and nuts. This was intended to be visually similar to the mortar the Hebrew slaves used to build bricks for the Egyptians.

The Passover traditionally also included wine. After the destruction of the temple, a roasted lamb's shank was presented on a plate rather than lamb meat. Called the zeroa, this is not eaten; it is a reminder that the temple—where the sacrifice would have been performed—was gone (Zimmerman, *Celebrating Biblical Feasts*, 66).

Feast of Unleavened Bread

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a week-long remembrance that consecrated the coming season. It may be considered an extension of the Passover feast rather than an independent holiday. The biblical texts intertwine the two feasts, with the Passover celebrated on the first day of the feast—the 14th of Abib—and the Feast of Unleavened Bread celebrated on the following day (Exod 13:3–10; Lev 23:4–8). The Feast of Unleavened Bread continued for seven days and required daily offerings. The feast demanded a rejection of leavened bread from the Israelites' meals, households, and storage places (Deut 16:4). It concluded with a convocation and rest from laborious activity (Lev 23:8).

While the Feast of Unleavened Bread was not a pilgrimage feast, it was often celebrated in Jerusalem, since Passover's pilgrimage would have already occurred. This feast likely included the waving of the firstfruits, signaling the dedication of the coming growing season (Exod 34:26; Lev 23:10–14).

Feast of Weeks (Pentecost)

The Feast of Weeks, alternatively called the Feast of Harvest or Pentecost, celebrated the grain harvest and the renewal of the covenant. It is named for the seven weeks separating it from the Passover celebration. The Feast of Weeks celebrated the entrance into the promised land and its bounty (Lev 23:10).

The Feast of Weeks was marked by the offering of the firstfruits of the grain harvest. In contrast to the Passover feast, this grain offering explicitly included leaven (Lev 23:17). Meat offerings of bulls, a ram, and seven lambs were also required (Num 28:27). Deuteronomy indicates that the Feast of Weeks was to be celebrated at the temple once it had been established (Deut 16:11). This makes the Feast of Weeks one of the pilgrimage feasts. The date of the feast is “from the day after the Sabbath” (Lev 23:15); it generally falls around the sixth of Sivan.

The Book of Jubilees indicates that the Feast of Weeks included a covenant-renewal ceremony. Thus, the festival may have (at one time) been called the Feast of Oaths (שְׁבֻעוֹת, shevu'oth) rather than the Feast of Weeks (שָׁבֻעוֹת, shavu'oth). The ceremony reflects the renewal of the covenant prior to the entry into the land (Deuteronomy) and after the conquest of the land (Josh 24). In addition to covenant renewal, the Feast of Weeks included the reading of the book of Ruth. This reflects the harvest that provided for Ruth and Naomi, and Ruth's acceptance into the community of God.

Fall Feasts

Three feasts occurred in the month of Tishri:

1. The Feast of Trumpets called for repentance.
2. The Day of Atonement sought redemption.
3. The Feast of Tabernacles, a pilgrimage feast, remembered the fulfillment of the redemption from Egypt (Glaser, Fall Feasts of Israel, 16).

Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah)

The Feast of Trumpets signaled a call for repentance. Leviticus says that it should be announced with the blast of trumpets and be treated as a holy convocation. A food offering was included in the celebrations alongside the prohibition against work (Lev 23:23–25). The meat offerings of the feast were the same as those of the Feast of Weeks, but with only one bull (Num 29:2).

The Feast of Trumpets marked the beginning of a new agricultural year. It was unusual in that the trumpet, likely the shofar, would announce the feast and assemble the people. This feast dedicated the new agricultural year to God for His provision. Psalm 81 may allude to the Feast of Trumpets (Psa 81:3) in the context of the deliverance from Egypt. The psalm ends with a call for repentance, reminding the people to call upon the Lord as those in Egypt did (Psa 81:11–16).

Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)

The Day of Atonement was the most holy of the feasts—the one time each year when the high priest could approach the mercy seat to make atonement for the nation’s sins. It occurred on the tenth day of Tishri, and was treated as a Sabbath (Lev 16:29). The Day of Atonement, described in detail in Lev 16, contained precise procedures and sacrifices:

- The high priest had to be properly bathed and attired for the ceremony (Lev 16:4).
- A bull was offered as a sin offering for the high priest and his household. Since the high priest made intercession for the nation, this purification was particularly important. Purification for the high priest is repeated four times: Lev 16:6, 11, 17, and 24.
- Two goats were placed at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. One was sacrificed as a sin offering and one would be the scapegoat sent to Azazel (Lev 16:7–10). A sin offering for the people was offered at least three times: Lev 16:10, 17, 24.
- After the offering of the bull, a censer of fire and incense was presented in the most holy place. The blood of the bull was then sprinkled upon the mercy seat of the Ark (Lev 16:12–14).
- The goat for the sin offering was sacrificed and its blood sprinkled upon the mercy seat to make atonement for the most holy place (Lev 16:15–16). The blood from both the bull and the goat was then spread on the horns of the altar seven times (Lev 16:18–19).

- The high priest touched the scapegoat and confessed national sins over the animal. It was then set loose into the wilderness (Lev 16:21–22).
- The high priest changed to normal priestly robes, bathed, and then offered burnt offerings for both himself and the people. The fat of the sin offering was burnt. The remains of the sin offerings were removed from the camp and burned (Lev 16:27–28).

The individual(s) who led the scapegoat to the wilderness washed their clothes and bathed before returning to camp (Lev 16:26).

There were 15 sacrifices total (three sin offerings and 12 burnt offerings) and the scapegoat.

The peoples' impurity demanded the purification of the tabernacle and the altar. Sin and purification were the focus of the day's events (Rooker, *Leviticus*, 211–13). The Day of Atonement was the only fast day commanded in the Mosaic Law.

Feast of Tabernacles

The Feast of Tabernacles commemorates the period of the wilderness wanderings directly following the exodus from Egypt. It lasted seven days, beginning on the 15th of Tishri. It is also called the Feast of Ingathering, since it gathered the people together after the harvesting season and was the final pilgrim feast of Israel.

The feast opened and closed with convocations of the people. There were daily sacrifices. The final day of the feast may have had the same rules against working as the Feast of Unleavened Bread (MacRae, "Meaning and Evolution of the Feast of Tabernacles," 258). The remembrance of the wilderness wandering was considered an occasion of joy, connected to God's saving work on Israel's behalf. A large number of sacrifices were offered during the week's celebration (Num 29:12–38).

Feasts of the Exilic and Intertestamental Periods

Besides the Mosaic feasts, the most well-known Israelite feasts are introduced in the books of Esther and the Maccabees. The earlier feasts relate to the exodus directly or through their association with the Sinai covenant. The later feasts are each associated with a distinct saving act.

Purim

Purim—the Feast of Lots—was an exilic-era feast celebrating the Jewish deliverance from Haman’s plan to massacre them. Gerleman has suggested that Purim is an exilic equivalent to the Passover. While this is not commonly accepted, Purim did celebrate salvation (Schellekens, “Accession Days and Holidays,” 117).

Purim was characterized by celebration, not sacrifice. The feast occurred on the 14th and 15th day of the month of Adar (February—March). It was a feast of excess, with the 13th of Adar was a day of fasting. The book of Esther was read in commemoration of Purim—typically on the night before.

Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah)

The Feast of Dedication—also called the Festival of Lights or Hanukkah—commemorated the cleansing of the temple during the Maccabean Revolt. It had been defiled by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes, but the Maccabees restored it in 164 BC. The name “Festival of Lights” comes from a legend: when the altar was rededicated, there was only oil enough for one day. The temple menorah miraculously remained lit for eight days. For this reason, Hanukkah was celebrated for eight days beginning on the 25th of Kislev (1 Macc 4:52–59). Its festivities were similar to those for the Feast of Tabernacles (2 Macc 10:6).

Nicanor

The defeat of the general Nicanor was celebrated on the 13th of Adar (1 Macc 7:49). Since this was the day before Purim, it was a day of fasting. Nicanor’s death was remembered on Purim.

Feasts in the New Testament

Several Israelite feasts are mentioned in the New Testament, especially in the Gospels as they narrate the course of Jesus’ ministry. The proper observance of the Sabbath, especially, figures prominently in Jesus’ conflicts with the Pharisees (see, e.g., Matt 12:1–14; Mark 2:23–3:6; Luke 6:1–11; 13:10–17). Christ visited Jerusalem during the Passover (Luke 2:41; John 2:13, 23) and the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22), and was ultimately crucified at the Passover (Matt 26:2, 17; Mark 14:1; Luke 22:1, 7; John 19:14). The Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples on Pentecost (Acts 2). The Christian

community usually reinterpreted these feasts as signs of Christ's saving works. The Bible ends with the anticipation of one final feast: the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9).

Selected Resources for Further Study

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FEASTS AND FESTIVALS OF ISRAEL

Occasions of public or private rejoicing to commemorate some significant event or personage. The element of celebration has a special meaning in the cycle of religious occasions and the rites and ceremonies associated with these particular days. While the idea of a feast commonly implies a banquet with plenteous food and drink, this element is not indispensable. Sometimes there is only a token amount, as in the celebration of Holy Communion.

In contemporary usage “festival” usually refers to activities extending over a period of time, while “feast” indicates one part of the celebration, often a meal. However, in religious usage, both ancient and modern, the two words are used interchangeably. The ancient Hebrews employed the words mo’ed (“seasons”) and hag for their great public celebrations, while feasts of a more private nature were commonly described by the term mishteh. The majority of English translations of Scripture do not differentiate between these words.

ANNUAL FEASTS AND FESTIVALS OF ISRAEL (Beginning with Nisan [Abib], the first month in the calendar of Israel)

| Feasts and Festivals | Day(s) and Post- (Pre-) exilic Month | Gregorian Month | Major References |
|---|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Passover | 14th of Nisan (Abib) | March/April | Ex 12:1–30; Lv 23:5; Nm 9:1–5; 28:16; Dt 16:1–8 |
| Unleavened Bread | 15th–21st of Nisan (Abib) | March/April | Ex 34:18–21; Lv 23:6–8; Nm 28:17–25; Dt 16:1–8, 16–17 |
| Firstfruits | 22d of Nisan (Abib) | March/April | Lv 23:9–14 |
| Pentecost (Shavout, Harvest, Weeks) | 6th of Sivan | May/June | Ex 34:22; Lv 23:15–21; Nm 28:26–31; Dt 16:9–12, 16–17 |
| Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah) | 1st of Tishri (Ethanim) | September/October | Lv 23:23–25; Nm 29:1–6 |
| Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) | 10th of Tishri (Ethanim) | September/October | Lv 16:29–34; 23:26–32; Nm 29:7–11 |
| Tabernacles (Shelters Succoth, Booths, Ingathering) | 15th–22d of Tishri (Ethanim) | September/October | Ex 34:22; Lv 23:33–43; Nm 29:12–38; Dt 16:13–17 |
| Dedication (Lights, Hanukkah) | 25th of Kislev | November/ December | 1 Macc 4:41–59; 2 Macc 10:6–8; Jn 10:22 |
| Nicanor (Fast of Esther) | 13th of Adar | February/March | 1 Macc 7:33–49 |
| Purim (Lots) | 14th of Adar | February/March | Est 9:21, 27–28 |

Feasts and Their Functions

Each festival places great emphasis on community participation and on the continuity of social or religious tradition, especially where the celebrations are elements of a regular civil or religious calendar. Without community backing, even in a family celebration, no festival can be successful. When there is communal participation, a festival can reinforce the individual and community memory of specific occasions, and can perpetuate that store of recollection over years and generations. Such shared memory has a cohesive effect upon a cooperating community, large or small, and serves to establish the traditions by which the group lives. If the festival commemorates a particular event or celebrates some lofty ideal, that theme becomes more firmly embedded in the minds of the participants by being associated repeatedly with the rites and ceremonies performed. The feasts of the ancient Hebrews had this positive function. The great festivals of their religious calendar commemorated specific occasions when God had reached out in power to intervene for his people or had provided for them in their distress. By celebrating these feasts on a regular basis, the Hebrews continually affirmed that their God had directed their destiny. Their repeated rehearsal of God's help and love for them reminded them that he was still able to sustain them. Especially in times of hardship, it pointed to the reality of God's presence and activity among them. Faith sustained by this means furnished an invaluable spiritual dimension to the life of the nation and provided a sense of continuity under divine provision and guidance. Only when corrupt or pagan elements were introduced into festive occasions did this important ingredient of national life begin to lose its vitality.

Old Testament Festivals

General Festivals - These occasions were surprisingly numerous in Israel, considering the rather austere mode of life reflected in much of the OT. No doubt such celebrations offset or compensated for the hardships and insecurities of existence in the ancient Near East, and the Israelites made the most of every opportunity. A wedding was one of the most obvious occasions for celebration, and it is not surprising that a feast was prepared for the marriage of Rachel and Jacob (Gn 29:22) in which the whole neighborhood participated. Just how long this particular feast lasted is unknown, but some marriage festivals continued for a week, as in the case of the marriage between Samson and the woman of Timnah (Jgs 14:17). Wine that makes glad man's heart (Ps 104:15) was consumed freely on such occasions.

Birthdays were often observed in a festive spirit, especially where a royal person was concerned (Gn 40:20). Solomon's dream was commemorated with a feast provided for his servants (1 Kgs 3:15), and when the temple was dedicated, the occasion was celebrated for a full week (8:65). Kings and queens held feasts periodically to mark certain occasions or to express goodwill (cf. Est 1:3; 2:18; 5:4, 14; 7:2, 7; Dn 5:1). Herdsmen traditionally made a feast for the shearing of the first sheep (Dt 18:4).

Preexilic Festivals - In addition to the general festivals, which were frequently of a secular nature, communal feasts were prescribed for the Israelites that had a specifically spiritual significance. They were meant to emphasize the activity of God on behalf of his people and to remind them that continued divine blessing depended upon their obedience to his will. The catalog of festivals in Leviticus 23:2 began with an injunction to observe the Sabbath. The seventh day, in which God ceased from creating (Gn 2:3), was holy, though it is difficult to determine the extent to which it was kept until the time of Moses (Ex 20:8–11). From that time on, Sabbath observance stressed refraining from all work so as to commemorate properly God's own rest from creative activity (31:17) and his deliverance of his people from bondage in Egypt (Dt 5:12–15). Sabbath celebration was the sign of a special relationship between God and the Israelites. During this 24-hour period, even trivial tasks like making a fire (Ex 35:3) or gathering wood (Nm 15:32–33) were prohibited on pain of death. Journeys of any distance also came under the Sabbath ban (Ex 16:29). Special offerings were part of the observance (Nm 28:9–10), and the bread of the Presence was replaced in the tabernacle (Lv 24:5–8). Despite the restrictions on activity, the Sabbath was meant to symbolize a time of happiness and security in the presence of God (cf. Is 58:13–14), since its observance would bring blessing to the individual and to the whole land.

FESTIVAL OF THE NEW MOON

The new moon was a monthly celebration based on the lunar calendar. It was especially appropriate for an agricultural people, since everyone could tell when the moon was new. Special offerings were prescribed for this festival, consisting of a burnt sacrifice, a grain offering, and a drink offering (Nm 28:11–15). In addition, a male goat was sacrificed to God as a sin offering, and trumpet blasts were sounded over the sacrificial offerings as a memorial before God (10:10). The sacrifices prescribed for the new moon festival were significantly greater than those required in Numbers 28:9–10 for the weekly Sabbath.

This lunar feast was popular throughout Israelite history. During the monarchy, the Levites were required to assist the Aaronic priests at the new moon festival, as well as on the Sabbath (1 Chr 23:29–31). The preexilic prophets may well have taken advantage of the large gatherings to give guidance to the people or proclaim prophetic oracles (cf. 2 Kgs 4:23), though to what extent this was done is uncertain. Not everyone found the period of rest and celebration valuable, however, and Amos (Am 8:5) complained about those avaricious Israelites who felt that such observances interfered with the business of making a living. The feast could not be observed when the Judeans were in exile in Babylonia (cf. Hos 2:11), but under Ezra and Nehemiah, its observance was restored (Neh 10:33). In Isaiah 66:22–23 it was related to Israel’s final destiny and was an accepted part of the ordinances for Ezekiel’s ideal temple (Ez 45:17).

The purpose of the festival was to enhance the unity of national life by reminding the Israelites that God’s covenant with their ancestors was permanent and still binding upon the nation. It also stressed the loving nature and providence of a God who could begin such a relationship and carry out his promises with complete faithfulness (cf. Ps 104:19).

THE FESTIVAL OF TRUMPETS

The Festival of Trumpets was celebrated on the first day of the seventh new moon. This month, subsequently named Tishri, was especially holy, and for this reason was governed by certain regulations different from those of ordinary new moon festivals. The trumpets were blown on the first day (Lv 23:24) as the animal and cereal sacrifices were offered. From Numbers 29:2–6 it appears that the offerings required for this particular feast exceeded those prescribed for normal Sabbath sacrifice, but were somewhat less than those required for the regular new moon festival (cf. Nm 28:11). This feast was to be observed as a day of solemn rest and as a holy convocation, and the trumpets were sounded as a triumphant memorial to God’s great provision for his people through the Sinai covenant.

The seventh month was particularly sacred, partly because of its place in the hallowed cycle of sevens, but also because the Day of Atonement (or Yom Kippur) and the Feast of Tabernacles, or Booths (Shelters), occurred during this period. The latter feast followed the Day of Atonement by some five days (Lv 23:33), and its joyful character served to offset somewhat the solemnity of the annual penitential occasion when the nation confessed its collective sins and saw them banished symbolically into the wilderness as the scapegoat was driven from the congregation.

THE SABBATICAL YEAR

Another festival closely connected with the institution of the Sabbath was the sabbatical year. At the end of each cycle of six years, the following 12 months were observed as a “sabbath of rest for the land.” During this interval, the ground was to lie fallow (Ex 23:11) without any form of cultivation, and whatever sprouted and grew from it naturally was assigned to the poor and needy (Lv 25:6). This provision for the land itself constituted one of the most important ecological principles of Scripture. Like God’s people, the land was holy, and just as they needed to have regular intervals of rest from daily work in order to regain their energy and spiritual vitality through worship, so the ground needed to rest and recuperate from the strain of constant cultivation. The festival reminded the Israelites that the land on which they lived had been given to them by God in fulfillment of his covenant undertaking to provide richly for their physical needs (cf. Dt 8:7–10). To keep the Israelites from experiencing any shortages or other hardships during the Year of Sabbath, God promised that in the year immediately preceding the sabbatical period, the land would bear fruit to suffice for the next three years (Lv 25:21). This assurance was based upon the experience of the wilderness wanderings, when on the sixth day of the week sufficient manna appeared to last through the Sabbath (Ex 16:5).

In this festival period, God’s absolute claim over the land was reaffirmed (cf. Lv 25:23), and the faith of the nation in God’s ability to provide for future needs was reinforced. The provisions that freed the land for a year from agricultural bondage were paralleled in the seventh year of rest by those requiring liberation of slaves and debtors. These underprivileged members of society were to be released from their obligations of servitude. As a result, men and women who had become slaves for one reason or another were given personal liberty (Ex 21:2–6), and under proclamation of the Lord’s release, the provisions applying to debt were rescinded (Dt 15:1–6). The sabbatical year seems to have been a regular part of preexilic Israelite life, although some abuses were noted in Jeremiah 34:8–22. There the prophet took advantage of the opportunity presented to instruct the people in the nature and purpose of the sabbatical year ordinance. He also warned the wayward Judeans that because they had disobeyed the commands of God in denying proper liberty to their slaves, they would have their own freedom taken away in a far more serious manner by being carried captive to Babylonia after seeing their land destroyed. The lesson was not lost upon those who returned from exile, for under the administration of Nehemiah, the Jews bound themselves by a covenant to observe the principle of the sabbatical year (Neh 10:31). This undertaking evidently took its impetus from the reading of the law of

Moses at the Feast of Booths (Shelters), which coincidentally occurred at the beginning of the sabbatical year (Neh 8:13–18).

JUBILEE

Still another feast based on the principle of the sabbath was the Year of Jubilee, or Pentecostal year (Lv 25:8–55; 27:17–24). As the sabbatical year was related to the concept of the seventh day, so the Pentecostal (50th) year marked the completion of a cycle of seven sabbatical years. The commencement of a jubilee year was proclaimed on the Day of Atonement throughout the land by means of trumpet blasts (Lv 25:9). The activities that took place during the Pentecostal year were similar to those prescribed for the sabbatical year. A special feature was that land that had been sold during the preceding 49 years was returned to its original owners, a procedure that sometimes involved financial adjustments. To prevent abuse of the process through opportunism or speculation, the Hebrews were instructed to deal fairly and honestly with one another in the fear of God, who was the real owner of the land (Lv 25:14–17). As with the sabbatical year, God promised to make provision before the jubilee year so that no one would suffer hardship. It was during the Year of Jubilee that those who were slaves in Hebrew households were given their liberty, so that everyone in the land would commence a new cycle of sabbatical years on the same footing, as free persons under God.

Seasonal Festivals

Three annual festivals that followed the seasons of the year rather than phases of the moon furnished important occasions for commemorating God's power and provision in national life. These festivals were designated by the term *hag*, indicating a festival usually observed by some sort of pilgrimage. These three festivals were prescribed in Exodus 23:14–17 and Deuteronomy 16:16, and consisted of the Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), and the Festival of Booths (Tabernacles). On these occasions, all the males of Israel were commanded to make pilgrimage to the sanctuary and celebrate these festivals (Ex 12:14). The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were originally separate ordinances, but since the latter always followed immediately upon the Passover rite, they naturally blended into a single festival.

PASSOVER - The Passover was of supreme theological significance for the Israelites, since it marked one of the most momentous acts of divine intervention in their history, the beginning of their deliverance from bondage in Egypt when, in the final plague, God destroyed the firstborn of the

Egyptians but spared those Israelites whose homes had blood smeared on the doorposts (Ex 12:11–30). God commanded that the day was to be observed as a memorial feast (v 14), and the next Passover celebration occurred in the Sinai Desert (Nm 9:1–5). In the Hebrew calendar the Passover festival came in the first month, called Abib in Deuteronomy 16:1, but known after the exile as Nisan (cf. Neh 2:1). The Passover rite took place the 14th evening (Lv 23:5), and this was followed by a seven-day period during which nothing leavened was to be eaten. The principle for removing all leaven from bread was similar to that underlying the draining of blood from animal flesh. Both leaven and blood had quickening power and were to be kept separate as an offering to God. The first and seventh days of this period were marked by a holy assembly, during which the only work permitted was the preparation of food (Ex 12:16). This period when unleavened bread was eaten was described as a festival because it opened the seven-week period of grain harvest (Dt 16:9). During this feast, special burnt sacrifices were offered, followed with a sheaf of newly harvested barley at the Feast of Firstfruits. By NT times the festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread were well-attended celebrations and were known as the “days of unleavened bread” (Lk 22:1; Acts 12:3). The theme of Israel’s deliverance from the power of Egypt by divine intervention assured the Israelites that God was always ready to act on behalf of a faithful and obedient covenant people. It also reminded them that they had once been slaves (Dt 16:12). In Israelite life the early Passover and Unleavened Bread observances were comparatively simple in character, but during the monarchy more elaborate Passover rituals came into use (cf. 2 Kgs 23:21–23; 2 Chr 35:1–19).

PENTECOST - The second great festival, Pentecost (or Weeks) lasted one day only and was observed on the 50th day after the newly harvested barley sheaf had been waved before the Lord at the end of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Dt 16:9–12). The festival marked the end of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest, the beginning of the period when firstfruits could be offered (cf. Ex 23:16; 34:22; Nm 28:26). The feast day was marked by the presentation of two wheat-flour loaves along with sacrifices of seven lambs, two rams, and a bull (Lv 23:15–20). Freewill gifts to God were presented to reflect gratitude for his blessings, and the entire occasion was one of communal rejoicing (Dt 16:10–11). Since Pentecost was essentially a harvest festival (Ex 23:16), the Israelites were called on to recognize that they depended entirely upon God for their material prosperity. In Deuteronomy 26, specific instructions were given for the ritual of presenting firstfruits from the harvest. It comprised a great confession of faith set within the framework of Israel’s history, and it recounted God’s

deliverance of the nation from Egyptian oppression and his provision of a land that could amply supply the needs of his people.

FESTIVAL OF TABERNACLES - This festival, known variously as the Feast of Booths, Tabernacles, Shelters (Lv 23:34; Dt 16:13), or Ingathering (Ex 34:22), was the third great occasion that all Hebrew males were required to observe annually. It began on the 15th day of the seventh month (Tishri), shortly after the observance of the Day of Atonement, which fell on the 10th day. The Feast of Booths lasted for one week and involved pilgrimage. It was associated initially with the end of the year (Ex 34:22), when the agricultural work had been completed. The first day was marked by a symbolic cessation from all activity, after which burnt offerings were presented to the Lord. The eighth day was also one on which the congregation of Israel abstained from manual work and again offered burnt sacrifices. Leviticus 23:39–43 furnished details for the rituals that gave the festival its special name of booths or shelters or tabernacles. The fruit of “goodly trees” was to be gathered on the first day of the feast, along with palm fronds, willow branches, and boughs from trees in full leaf. From these, rough shelters or booths were to be constructed in which the people lived for the week of the feast. Every seventh year the observances were marked by a public recital of the covenant provisions to which the Israelites under Moses had committed themselves, a procedure designed to keep fresh in their minds the obligations as well as the blessings of the covenant relationship. A particularly significant observance of the Feast of Tabernacles took place in the time of Ezra, when the Judean community returned from Babylon—a celebration of a kind unknown for centuries (Neh 8:13–18). From the context it appears that observance of the feast had lapsed during the monarchy. The feast at Shiloh where Hannah was mistaken for a drunken woman and the feast referred to in Judges 21:19 were evidently the Feast of Booths. In a prophetic vision in which he saw all nations coming to Jerusalem to observe the Festival of Booths, Zechariah warned that those who did not continue this tradition could expect hardship and shortages of food (Zec 14:16–19).

Postexilic Festivals

There are a few minor festivals that were created in the period after the Jews returned from exile; some of these festivals had their origin in specific historical occasions.

THE FESTIVAL OF PURIM - The Festival of Purim, also known as the Festival of Lots, was a joyful occasion occurring on the 14th day of the 12th month (Adar). It celebrated the way in which Esther and Mordecai were used by God to deliver his people in the Persian Empire from extermination by Haman

(Est 9:21, 24–28). The feast was observed on the 14th day of Adar by those living in villages, and on the 15th by the inhabitants of walled towns and cities. The explanation of the name of the festival is given in Esther 9:24–26, and its observance reminded the Hebrews of God’s ability to save them during a time of anti-Semitic activity in Persia. The deliverance memorialized in this festival has consoled the Jews on other occasions when they have suffered persecution. Traditionally the scroll of Esther was read aloud in the synagogue on the evening before the feast, and there was a great outcry, especially among the children present, whenever the names of the hated Haman and his sons were mentioned.

FESTIVAL OF THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE - Another joyous festival that lasted for eight days was the Feast of the Dedication of the Temple (1 Macc 4:52–59; 2 Macc 10:6–8), familiar to modern readers as Hanukkah, or the Festival of Lights. The specific dedication that prompted the feast occurred in 164 BC, when Judas Maccabeus reconsecrated the temple in Jerusalem after it had been defiled by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The celebrations commenced on the 25th day of the ninth month (Kislev) and were marked at night by blazing lights and lanterns. The stories of brave opposition by the Maccabees to the crushing forces of paganism were recounted, and the feast was one of praise to God for his marvelous deliverance of the Jews during the Maccabean period.

New Testament Festivals

In Christ’s time the Sabbath was observed rigorously and was the occasion for synagogue worship (cf. Lk 4:16; Acts 13:14; 18:4). Pharisaic law prohibited all work, and Jesus came into conflict with the authorities periodically for breaches of the Sabbath regulations (cf. Mt 12:1–4; Mk 3:1–5; Lk 13:10–17). In the primitive church, worship occurred on “the first day of the week” (i.e., Sunday) to commemorate Christ’s resurrection. The early Christians initially participated in Jewish ceremonies (cf. Acts 20:16; 1 Cor 16:8). It was during the Feast of Pentecost, after Christ’s resurrection and ascension, that the Spirit was poured out (Acts 2:1–4), fulfilling Joel 2:28–32 and commencing the history of the Christian church as such.

The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread were of great significance in the life of Christ (cf. Jn 4:45; 5:1; 6:4; 12:1–26), for the occasion was a very popular one in NT times (cf. 12:20). On the Passover, Pilate had instituted the custom of clemency to a prisoner nominated by the populace (Mt 27:15; Mk 15:6). Jesus participated actively in the Passover rituals (cf. Lk 2:42; Jn 2:13; 6:4). The Last Supper with his disciples occurred just prior to the Passover (Jn 13:1), when Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus to the

Pharisees (Lk 22:4–6). The breaking of bread and the drinking of wine at that Passover celebration (Mk 14:22–25) were related directly to Christ’s forthcoming death on the cross in a sacramental manner. Christ’s disciples were instructed to observe this rite as a memorial of his suffering and death for human sin (1 Cor 11:24–26) and as a proclamation of the power of the cross until the Lord returns in glory. Some scholars have suggested that Christ was actually hanging on the cross when the Passover lamb was being slaughtered, and if that chronology is correct, it would represent Jesus graphically as the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29, RSV). Jesus was also present once when the Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated (7:10). In his day water was carried in procession from the pool of Siloam as an offering to God, and the ceremony most probably prompted Christ’s discourse on living water and eternal life (vv 37–39). On at least one occasion Jesus was in Jerusalem when the Festival of Lights occurred (Jn 10:22) and narrowly missed death by stoning.

Jesus was entertained occasionally at private feasts (cf. Lk 5:29), and once remedied an emergency situation when the wine ran out at a wedding ceremony (Jn 2:8–10). He was critical of the Pharisees for securing the chief seats at feasts (Mt 23:6; Mk 12:39; Lk 20:46) and taught that festivals ought to benefit the poor (Lk 14:13).

Symbolism of Feasts

Many aspects of the ancient Hebrew feasts were interpreted symbolically in the early church. Paul regarded the earliest Hebrew Christians as the firstfruits of the Israel of God (Rom 11:16). In Romans 8:23, the Holy Spirit as possessed by Christians was regarded as only a token of what was to come, and as such was the firstfruit of the Spirit. Christians themselves were described in James 1:18 as the firstfruits of God’s creatures who were brought forth by the Word of Truth. The resurrection of Jesus was considered by Paul to be the firstfruits of those who slept (1 Cor 15:20, 23). In an allusion to OT festivals, Paul spoke of the Sabbaths, new moons, and feasts as merely being a shadow of good things to come (Col 2:16–17). The Passover was used figuratively to emphasize that Christ our Passover Lamb had been sacrificed for us. Believers were urged to keep the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth, and not with the old leaven of malice and evil (1 Cor 5:7–8).

Elwell, Walter A., and Philip Wesley Comfort. *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale House Publishers, 2001.

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FESTIVALS

Regular religious celebrations remembering God's great acts of salvation in the history of His people. Traditionally called "feasts" in the English Bibles, these can conveniently be categorized according to frequency of celebration. Many of them were timed according to cycles of seven. The cycle of the week with its climax on the seventh day provided the cyclical basis for much of Israel's worship; as the seventh day was observed, so was the seventh month (which contained four of the national festivals), and the seventh year, and the fiftieth year (the year of Jubilee), which followed seven cycles each of seven years. Not only were the festivals as a whole arranged with reference to the cycle of the week (Sabbath), two of them (the feast of unleavened bread and the feast of tabernacles) lasted for seven days each. Each began on the 15th of the month—at the end of two cycles of weeks and when the moon was full. Pentecost also was celebrated on the 15th of the month and began 50 days after the presentation of the firstfruits—the day following seven times seven weeks.

Sabbath

The seventh day of each week was listed among the festivals (Lev. 23:1–3). It functioned as a reminder of the Lord's rest at the end of the creation week (Gen. 2:3) and also of the deliverance from slavery in Egypt (Deut. 5:12–25). The Sabbath day was observed by strict rest from work from sunset until sunset (Exod. 20:8–11; Neh. 13:15–22). Each person was to remain in place and not engage in travel (Exod. 16:29; Lev. 23:3). Despite such restrictions even as kindling a fire (Exod. 35:3) or any work (Exod. 31:14; 35:2), the Sabbath was a joyful time (Isa. 58:13–14).

New Moon

This festival was a monthly celebration characterized by special offerings, great in quantity and quality (Num. 28:11–15), and blowing of trumpets (Num. 10:10; Ps. 81:3). According to Amos 8:5, business ceased. The festivals of the new moon and Sabbath are often mentioned together in the OT (Isa. 1:13; 66:23; Ezek. 45:17; 46:1, 3). This festival provided the occasion for King Saul to stage a state banquet and for the family of David to offer a special annual sacrifice (1 Sam. 20:5, 6, 24, 29). David's arrangements for the Levites included service on the new moon (1 Chron. 23:31), and the ministry of the prophets was sometimes connected with this occasion (2 Kings 4:23; Isa. 1:13; Ezek. 46:1; Hag. 1:1). Ezekiel mentioned four times receiving a vision on the first day of the month (Ezek. 26:1; 29:17; 31:1; 32:1). This day (along

with others) is included in prophetic denunciations of abuses of religious observances (Isa. 1:13–14). The new moon of the seventh month apparently received special attention (Lev. 23:24; Num. 29:1–6; Ezra 3:6; Neh. 8:2). Although the exile brought a temporary cessation (Hos. 2:11), the festival was resumed later (Neh. 10:33; Ezra 3:1–6). It was on the first day of the seventh month that Ezra read the law before the public assembly (Neh. 7:73b–8:2). For Paul, new moon festivals were viewed as only a shadow of better things to come (Col. 2:16–17; cp. Isa. 66:23).

Annual festivals required the appearance of all males at the sanctuary (Exod. 34:23; Deut. 16:16). These occasions—called “feasts to the Lord” (Exod. 12:14; Lev. 23:39, 41)—were times when freewill offerings were made (Deut. 16:16–17).

Passover

The first of the three annual festivals was the Passover. It commemorated the final plague on Egypt when the firstborn of the Egyptians died and the Israelites were spared because of the blood smeared on their doorposts (Exod. 12:11, 21, 27, 43, 48). Passover took place on the 14th day (at evening) of the first month (Lev. 23:5). The animal (lamb or kid) to be slain was selected on the 10th day of the month (Exod. 12:3) and slaughtered on the 14th day and then eaten (Deut. 16:7). None of the animal was to be left over on the following morning (Exod. 34:25). The uncircumcised and the hired servant were not permitted to eat the sacrifice (Exod. 12:45–49).

The Passover was also called the feast of unleavened bread (Exod. 23:15; Deut. 16:16) because only unleavened bread was eaten during the seven days immediately following Passover (Exod. 12:15–20; 13:6–8; Deut. 16:3–8). Unleavened bread reflected the fact that the people had no time to put leaven in their bread before their hasty departure from Egypt. It was also apparently connected to the barley harvest (Lev. 23:4–14).

During NT times large crowds gathered in Jerusalem to observe this annual celebration. Jesus was crucified during the Passover event. He and His disciples ate a Passover meal together on the eve of His death. During this meal Jesus said, “This is My body,” and “this cup is the new covenant in My blood” (Luke 22:17, 19–20 HCSB). The NT identifies Christ with the Passover sacrifice: “For Christ our Passover has been sacrificed” (1 Cor. 5:7 HCSB).

Feast of Weeks

The second of the three annual festivals was Pentecost, also called the feast of weeks (Exod. 34:22; Deut. 16:10, 16; 2 Chron. 8:13), the feast of harvest (Exod. 23:16), and the day of firstfruits (Num. 28:26; cp. Exod. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:17). It was celebrated seven complete weeks, or 50 days, after Passover (Lev. 23:15–16; Deut. 16:9); therefore, it was given the name Pentecost.

Essentially a harvest celebration, the term “weeks” was used of the period of grain harvest from the barley harvest to the wheat harvest, a period of about seven weeks. At this time the Lord was credited as the source of rain and fertility (Jer. 5:24). It was called “day of firstfruits” (Num. 28:26) because it marked the beginning of the time in which people were to bring offerings of firstfruits. It was celebrated as a sabbath with rest from ordinary labors and the calling of a holy convocation (Lev. 23:21; Num. 28:26). It was a feast of joy and thanksgiving for the completion of the harvest season. The able-bodied men were to be present at the sanctuary, and a special sacrifice was offered (Lev. 23:15–22; Num. 28:26–31). According to Lev. 23:10–11, 16–17, two large loaves were waved before the Lord by the anointed priests. These were made of fine flour from the new wheat and baked with leaven. They were a “wave offering” for the people. They could not be eaten until after this ceremony (Lev. 23:14; Josh. 5:10–11), and none of this bread was placed on the altar because of the leaven content. Also two lambs were offered. The feast was concluded by the eating of communal meals to which the poor, the stranger, and the Levites were invited.

Later tradition associated the feast of weeks with the giving of the law at Sinai. It had been concluded by some that Exod. 19:1 indicated the law was delivered on the fiftieth day after the exodus. Some thought that Deut. 16:12 may have connected the Sinai event and the festival, but Scripture does not indicate any definite link between Sinai and Pentecost. In the NT the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4), at the festive time when Jews from different countries were in Jerusalem to celebrate this annual feast. See Firstfruits; Pentecost.

The Day of Atonement

The third annual festival came on the 10th day of the seventh month (Tishri-Sept./Oct.) and the fifth day before the feast of tabernacles (Lev. 16:1–34; Num. 29:7–11). According to Lev. 23:27–28, four main elements comprise this most significant feast. First, it was to be a “holy convocation,” drawing the focus of the people to the altar of divine mercy. The holy One of Israel called the people of Israel to

gather in His presence and give their undivided attention to Him. Second, they were to “humble their souls” (“afflict your souls,” Lev. 23:27 KJV). This was explained by later tradition to indicate fasting and repentance. Israel understood that this was a day for mourning over their sins. The seriousness of this requirement is reiterated in Lev. 23:29, “If there is any person who will not humble himself on this same day, he shall be cut off from his people” (Lev. 23:29 NASB). Third, offerings are central to the Day of Atonement. The Bible devotes an entire chapter (Lev. 16) to them; they are also listed in Num. 29:7–11. In addition to these, when the day fell on a sabbath, the regular Sabbath offerings were offered. The fourth and final element of the day involved the prohibition of labor. The Day of Atonement was a “sabbath of rest” (Lev. 23:32), and the Israelites were forbidden to do any work at all. If they disobeyed, they were liable to capital punishment (Lev. 23:30).

The center point of this feast involved the high priest entering the holy of holies. Before entering, the high priest first bathed his entire body, going beyond the mere washing of hands and feet as required for other occasions. This washing symbolized his desire for purification. Rather than donning his usual robe and colorful garments (described in Exod. 28 and Lev. 8), he was commanded to wear special garments of linen. Also, the high priest sacrificed a bullock as a sin offering for himself and for his house (Lev. 16:6). After filling his censer with live coals from the altar, he entered the holy of holies where he placed incense on the coals. Then he took some of the blood from the slain bullock and sprinkled it on the mercy seat (“atonement cover,” Lev. 16:13 NIV) and also on the ground in front of the ark, providing atonement for the priesthood (Lev. 16:14–15). Next he sacrificed a male goat as a sin offering for the people. Some of this blood was then also taken into the holy of holies and sprinkled there on behalf of the people (Lev. 16:15). Then he took another goat, called the “scapegoat” (for “escape goat”), laid his hands on its head, confessed over it the sins of Israel, and then released it into the desert where it symbolically carried away the sins of the people (Lev. 16:8, 10). The remains of the sacrificial bullock and male goat were taken outside the city and burned, and the day was concluded with additional sacrifices.

According to Heb. 9–10 this ritual is a symbol of the atoning work of Christ, our great high Priest, who did not need to make any sacrifice for Himself but shed His own blood for our sins. As the high priest of the OT entered the holy of holies with the blood of sacrificial animals, Jesus entered heaven itself to appear on our behalf in front of the Father (Heb. 9:11–12). Each year the high priest repeated his sin offerings for his own sin and the sins of the people, giving an annual reminder that perfect and permanent atonement had not yet been made; but Jesus, through His own blood, accomplished eternal

redemption for His people (Heb. 9:12). Just as the sacrifice of the Day of Atonement was burned outside the camp of Israel, Jesus suffered outside the gate of Jerusalem so that He might redeem His people from sin (Heb. 13:11–12).

Feast of Tabernacles

The fourth annual festival was the feast of tabernacles (2 Chron. 8:13; Ezra 3:4; Zech. 14:16), also called the feast of ingathering (Exod. 23:16; 34:22), the feast to the Lord (Lev. 23:39; Judg. 21:19). Sometimes it was simply called “the feast” (1 Kings 8:2; 2 Chron. 5:3; 7:8; Neh. 8:14; Isa. 30:29; Ezek. 45:23, 25) because it was so well-known. Its observance combined the ingathering of the labor of the field (Exod. 23:16), the fruit of the earth (Lev. 23:39), the ingathering of the threshing floor and winepress (Deut. 16:13), and the dwelling in booths (or “tabernacles”), which were to be joyful reminders to Israel (Lev. 23:41; Deut. 16:14). The “booth” in Scripture is not an image of privation and misery but of protection, preservation, and shelter from heat and storm (Pss. 27:5; 31:20; Isa. 4:6). The rejoicing community included family, servants, widows, orphans, Levites, and sojourners (Deut. 16:13–15).

The feast began on the fifteenth day of Tishri (the seventh month), which was five days after the Day of Atonement. It lasted for seven days (Lev. 23:36; Deut. 16:13; Ezek. 45:25). On the first day, booths were constructed of fresh branches of trees. Each participant had to collect twigs of myrtle, willow, and palm in the area of Jerusalem for construction of the booths (Neh. 8:13–18). Every Israelite was to live for seven days in these during the festival, in commemoration of when their fathers lived in such booths after their exodus from Egypt (Lev. 23:40; Neh. 8:15). The dedication of Solomon’s temple took place at the feast (1 Kings 8:2).

After the return from exile, Ezra read the law and led the people in acts of penitence during this feast (Neh. 8:13–9:3). Later, Josephus referred to it as the holiest and greatest of the Hebrew feasts. Later additions to the ritual included a libation of water drawn from the pool of Siloam (the probable background for Jesus’ comments on “living water,” John 7:37–39) and the lighting of huge menorahs (candelabra) at the Court of the Women (the probable background for Jesus’ statement, “I am the light of the world,” John 8:12 HCSB). The water and the “pillar of light” provided during the wilderness wandering (when the people dwelt in tabernacles) was temporary and in contrast to the continuing water and light claimed by Jesus during this feast which commemorated that wandering period.

Feast of Trumpets

Modern Rosh Hashanah is traced back to the so-called “Feast of Trumpets,” the sounding of the trumpets on the first day of the seventh month (Tishri) of the religious calendar year (Lev. 23:24; Num. 29:1). The trumpet referred to here was the shophar, a ram’s horn. It was distinctive from the silver trumpets blown on the other new moons.

This day evolved into the second most holy day on the modern Jewish religious calendar. It begins the “ten days of awe” before the Day of Atonement. According to Lev. 23:24–27 the celebration consisted of the blowing of trumpets, a time of rest, and “an offering by fire.” The text itself says nothing specifically about a New Year’s Day, and the term itself (rosh hashanah) is found only one time in Scripture (Ezek. 40:1) where it refers to the 10th day. The postexilic assembly on the first day of the seventh month, when Ezra read the law, was not referred to as a feast day (Neh. 8:2–3). The fact that the OT contains two calendars—a civil and a religious one—further complicates our understanding of the origins of this holiday. Until modern times this day did not appear to be a major feast day.

Two feasts of postexilic origin are noted in Scripture—Purim and Hanukkah.

Purim - commemorating the deliverance of the Jews from genocide through the efforts of Esther (Esther 9:16–32), derives its name from the “lot” (pur) which Haman planned to cast in order to decide when he should carry into effect the decree issued by the king for the extermination of the Jews (Esther 9:24). In the apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees (15:36), it is called the Day of Mordecai. It was celebrated on the fourteenth day of Adar (March) by those in villages and unwalled towns and on the 15th day by those in fortified cities (Esther 9:18–19). No mention of any religious observance is connected with the day; in later periods, the book of Esther was read in the synagogue on this day. It became a time for rejoicing and distribution of food and presents.

Hanukkah - The other postexilic holiday was Hanukkah, a festival that began on the 25th day of Kislev (Dec.) and lasted eight days. Josephus referred to it as the Feast of Lights because a candle was lighted each successive day until a total of eight was reached. The festival commemorates the victories of Judas Maccabeus in 167 B.C. At that time, when temple worship was reinstated, after an interruption of three years, a celebration of eight days took place. The modern celebration does not greatly affect the routine duties of everyday life. This feast is referred to in John 10:22, where it is called the Feast of Dedication.

Two festivals occurred less often than once a year: the Sabbatical year and the Year of Jubilee.

Sabbatical Year Each seventh year Israel celebrated a sabbath year for its fields. This involved a rest for the land from all cultivation (Exod. 23:10, 11; Lev. 25:2–7; Deut. 15:1–11; 31:10–13). Other names for this festival were sabbath of rest (Lev. 25:4), year of rest (Lev. 25:5), year of release (Deut. 15:9), and the seventh year (Deut. 15:9). The Sabbatical year, like the Year of Jubilee, began on the first day of the month Tishri. This observance is attested by 1 Maccabees 6:49, 53 and Josephus. Laws governing this year of rest included the following: (1) the soil, vineyards, and olive orchards were to enjoy complete rest (Exod. 23:10–11; Lev. 25:4–5); (2) the spontaneous growth of the fields or trees (Isa. 37:30) was for the free use of the hireling, stranger, servants, and cattle (Exod. 23:10–11; Lev. 25:6–7), fruitful harvest was promised for the sixth year (Lev. 25:20–22); (3) debts were released for all persons, with the exception of foreigners (Deut. 15:1–4) (probably this law did not forbid voluntary payment of debts, no one was to oppress a poor man); (4) finally, at the Feast of Tabernacles during this year, the law was to be read to the people in solemn assembly (Deut. 31:10–13).

Jewish tradition interpreted 2 Chron. 36:21 to mean that the 70 years' captivity was intended to make up for not observing sabbatical years. After the captivity this Sabbatical Year was carefully observed.

Year of Jubilee

This was also called the year of liberty (Ezek. 46:17). Its relation to the Sabbatical Year and the general directions for its observance are found in Lev. 25:8–16, 23–55. Its bearing on lands dedicated to the Lord is given in Lev. 27:16–25.

After the span of seven sabbaths of years, or seven times seven years (49 years), the trumpet was to sound throughout the land; and the Year of Jubilee was to be announced (Lev. 25:8–9).

The law states three respects in which the Jubilee Year was to be observed: rest for the soil—no sowing, reaping, or gathering from the vine (Lev. 25:11); reversion of landed property (Lev. 25:10–34; 27:16–24)—all property in fields and houses located in villages or unwalled towns, which the owner had been forced to sell through poverty and which had not been redeemed, was to revert without payment to its original owner or his lawful heirs (exceptions noted in Lev. 25:29–30; 27:17–21); and redemption of slaves—every Israelite, who through poverty had sold himself to another Israelite or to a

foreigner settled in the land, if he had not been able to redeem himself or had not been redeemed by a kinsman, was to go free with his children (Lev. 25:39–41).

It appears that the Year of Jubilee was a time of such complete remission of all debts that it became a season of celebration of freedom and grace. In this year oppression was to cease, and every member of the covenant family was to find joy and satisfaction in the Lord of the covenant. God had redeemed His people from bondage in Egypt (Lev. 25:42), and none of them was again to be reduced to the status of a perennial slave. God's child was not to be oppressed (Lev. 25:43, 46); and poverty could not, even at its worst, reduce an Israelite to a status less than that of a hired servant, a wage earner, and then only until the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:40).

After the institution of the Year of Jubilee laws (Lev. 25:8–34), the year is mentioned again in Num. 36:4. No reference to the celebration of this festival is found in Scripture apart from the idealistic anticipation of Ezek. 46:17, but the influence of such laws illuminate such passages as the conduct of Naboth and Ahab in 1 Kings 21:3–29; and the prophetic rebukes found in Isa. 5:8 and Mic. 2:2.

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Brand, Chad, et al., editors. *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Holman Bible Publishers, 2003.

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THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS

TRUMPETS, FEAST OF, Num. 29:1; Lev. 23:24, the feast of the new moon, which fell on the first of Tisri. It differed from the ordinary festivals of the new moon in several important particulars. It was one of the seven days of holy convocation. Instead of the mere blowing of the trumpets at the temple at the time of the offering of the sacrifices, it was “a day of blowing of trumpets.” In addition to the daily sacrifices and the eleven victims offered on the first of every month, there were offered a young bullock, a ram, and seven lambs of the first year, with the accustomed meat offerings, and a kid for a sin offering. Num. 29:1–6. The regular monthly offering was thus repeated, with the exception of the young bullock. It has been conjectured that Ps. 81, one of the sons of Asaph, was composed expressly for the Feast of Trumpets. The psalm is used in the service for the day by the modern Jews. Various meanings have been assigned to the Feast of Trumpets; but there seems to be no sufficient reason to call in question the common opinion of Jews and Christians, that it was the festival of the New Year’s day of the civil year, the first of Tisri, the month which commenced the sabbatical year and the year of jubilee.

Smith, William. *Smith’s Bible Dictionary*, Thomas Nelson, 1986.

Exported from Logos Bible Software, 9:13 AM May 29, 2023.

TRUMPETS, THE FEAST OF - Occurring on the first day of the seventh month (September–October), this feast marked the beginning of the civil and agricultural year for the Jews; it was also referred to as Rosh Hashanah (lit., “head/beginning of the year”). Observed as a Sabbath with sacrifices and trumpet blasts, this day was intended for rest and to begin preparations for the coming Day of Atonement. The Mishnah makes this connection more explicit by identifying the Festival of Trumpets as the day when “all that come into the world pass before [God] like legions of soldiers” or flocks of sheep to be judged (m. Rosh HaSh. 1:2).

Longman, Tremper, III, et al., editors. *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Baker Books, 2013.

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THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

BOOTHS, FEAST OF (חג הסוכות, chag hassukoth, σκηνοπηγία, skēnopēgia). Also known by its transliteration, Sukkot. One of Israel's three great annual festivals, celebrated at the time of the agricultural harvest, in gratitude for Yahweh's present and historical provision.

Purpose and Date

During this festival Israel gathered luxuriant boughs and built booths in which to live for the span of the festival. These acts were meant to remind them of the time spent wandering in the desert. The Feast of Tabernacles is the last of the seven feasts described in the Pentateuch, starting four days after the Day of Atonement. It begins after the completion of grain threshing and pressing grapes, on the fifteenth day of Tishri (the seventh lunar month, which falls in late September to late October).

Biblical Relevance

Old Testament - Leviticus provides the most detailed instructions, indicating the time span and purpose of the festival as well as the plants to be used for the booths (Lev 23:33–36; 39–44). It is to be a seven-day festival, with a Sabbath rest and sacred assembly on the first and eighth days. On the first day the people were to take branches from palms, willows, and other luxuriant trees and rejoice before the Lord, and they were to live in booths for the week so their descendants would know that they lived in booths when God brought them out of Egypt.

In Exodus the feast is generally described as the Feast of Ingathering, as one of the three pilgrimage festivals through which Israel celebrated the Lord, (Exod 23:14–17; 34:22). In Deuteronomy 16:13–15 the Feast of Tabernacles is equated with the Feast of Ingathering and is said to be a celebration for all the ways God has blessed Israel. Every seventh year, the Jubilee, the people were to read the law during the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut 31:9–13), as Ezra does in Neh 8:13–18 (see also Ezra 3:4). Nehemiah 8 makes the connection that the branches were to be used to make the booths.

The Feast of Tabernacles is referred to in Hos 12:9, where God threatens that Israel will again be forced to live in “tents” (אֹהֲלִים, ohalim) as they do in their festivals. In Zechariah 14:16–19 the feast is mentioned in a positive context: all the nations who once attacked Israel will come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.

New Testament

In the New Testament, Jesus celebrates the feast of Tabernacles in John 7, and it is within this context that Jesus invites the thirsty to drink from Him and declares that He is the light of the world (Ulfgard, *Story of Sukkot*, 258–61). At the beginning of John 7, His brothers tell him to go show Himself to the world, since this feast was one of the biggest gatherings of Jews (see Josephus, below, for other public events at this feast). Jesus' teaching at the feast relates to the importance of the reading of the law. Jesus' invitation to the thirsty to come to Him to drink in John 7:37–44 relates to references to the Feast of Tabernacles in Zech 14:1–21 and Ezek 47:1–12; the setting is the water libation service, where water was brought up to the altar and poured over it (Rubenstein, *History of Sukkot*, 117–31). In John 8:12, when Jesus declares he is the “light of the world,” the setting could be the last night of the feast, when celebrants stayed up all night in the temple courts, which were lit by enormous lamps (Rubenstein, *The History of Sukkot*, 137–38).

C. W. Smith argues that the transfiguration has themes of the Feast of Tabernacles in the background (Mark 9:2–8; Smith, “Tabernacles,” 131–32). He also argues that the triumphal entry occurred at the Feast of Tabernacles and not prior to Passover (Mark 11:1–12:12; Smith, “Tabernacles,” 131; for other scholars making similar arguments, see Rubenstein, *History of Sukkot*, 84–94).

Extrabiblical Literature

There are many extrabiblical references to the Feast of Tabernacles, including 2 Maccabees, Philo, Josephus, and some of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Feast of Tabernacles may be the model for the ritual purification of the temple when the people celebrated for eight days and even took branches (later this became Hanukkah; 2 Maccabees 1:9, 18; 10:6–8). Philo reflects philosophically on the feast of Tabernacles (*On the Special Laws* 2.33.204–13).

Intertestamental

Some of the literature from Qumran probably mentioned the Feast of Tabernacles, though those sections have not survived (e.g., 4Q327, 4Q394). In the Temple Scroll (11Q12–20) cols. 28–29, the various sacrifices to be offered on the various days are listed, though this passage is also fragmentary.

Two letters (one in Aramaic, one in Greek) from the time of the Bar Kokhba revolt request that the four species of branches be sent to Jerusalem, presumably so they could celebrate Tabernacles (see also Rubenstein, *History of Sukkot*, 31–102.)

Josephus

Josephus describes the types of branches and the citron (etrog) used in the feast, also adding which sacrifices were made (Antiquities 3.10.4). He notes that the festival is a time when the high priest should read the law to the whole assembly of Israel (Antiquities 4.8.12). Josephus connects the festival into biblical history by discussing how:

- Solomon brought the ark into the temple during the feast of Tabernacles (Antiquities 8.4.1, 5; 1 Kgs 8:2).
- Jeroboam built his temples so that his people would not have to travel to Jerusalem for this feast; he was celebrating it at Bethel as high priest when Jadon came and prophesied against the altar (Antiquities 8.8.4; 1 Kgs 12:25–13:10).
- Ezra celebrated the festival (Antiquities 11.4.1; 11.5.5).

Josephus mentions the feast several times in his narrative between the time of the Maccabees and the destruction of Jerusalem. As a major gathering of people, it seems to be the time for public appearances and reading popular opinion about prominent individuals, and so often public gestures are made and trouble occurs:

- Jonathan makes himself high priest (Antiquities 13.2.3)
- Antiochus VII and John Hyrcanus come to a truce (Antiquities 13.8.2)
- The crowds show that they adore the high priest Aristobulus, sparking Herod's jealousy (Antiquities 15.3.3)
- Antigonus appears publicly to worship in fine clothes and armed guards, which proves to his brother Aristobulus I that he means to seize power (Jewish War 1.3.2)
- A group of pilgrims for the feast get in a fight with Samaritans (Antiquities 2.12.3)
- The hated Hasmonean king Alexander Jannaeus makes sacrifices at the Feast of Tabernacles, and all the people pelted him with the citrons they were carrying for the festival (Antiquities 13.13.5)
- Jesus son of Ananus prophesies against Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles, four years before the Romans destroy the Temple (Jewish War 6.5.3)

Rabbinic Judaism

How to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles is the subject of an entire Talmudic tractate, the Sukkah, and includes:

- how (and how not) to build a booth (הֶסֶךְ, sukkah)
- how one should live and eat in it
- how the four species (palm branch, myrtle, willow, and etrog/citron) were used in the service
- how the feast was celebrated in the temple (including the willow procession and the water libation)

The symbolism of the booth may have been found in the shade, which would remind Israel of God's presence and protection while the people wandered the desert (Rubenstein, "Symbolism [1994]," 377–82). Or, the frail and temporary nature of the booth may have reminded Israel in its time of joy that the pleasures of this life are fleeting and that it should look to the life to come (Rubenstein, "Symbolism [1996]," 387, 395–96).

Scholarly Discussion

The most comprehensive study of the Feast of Tabernacles focuses on how it was understood in early Judaism (Rubenstein, *The History of Sukkot*). The major opinions about the origin and nature of the Feast of Tabernacles include:

- The feast began as a spontaneous fall harvest festival that was eventually centralized and fixed to the calendar and, finally, given the historical significance of leaving exodus (Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 85–86; 94–96; 101; 104).
- It was originally an agricultural festival like that celebrated by the Canaanites (Kraus, *Worship in Israel*, 61–64).
- It was a New Year celebration like the Babylonians celebrated and not an agricultural festival (Volz, *Das Neujahrsfest Jahwes*, 13).
- It was like the Babylonian new year, but it celebrated the enthronement of the Lord (Mowinckel, *Psalms*, 1:119, 136).
- The Feast of Tabernacles was a covenant renewal celebration (see the summary of many form critics in Rubenstein, *History of Sukkot*, 23–24).
- Modern studies pack more theological significance into the festival than it rightly contained; the festival is referred to often in ancient literature since it was the example of temple worship par excellence, and not because of its inherent theological meaning (Ulfsgard, *Story of Sukkot*, 12–13).

Selected Resources for Further Study

- Kraus, Hans Joachim. *Worship in Israel: A Cultic History of the Old Testament*. Louisville: John Knox, 1966.
- Mowinckel, Sigmund. *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*. 2 vols. Translated by D. R. Ap-Thomas. Nashville: Abingdon, 1962.
- Rubenstein, Jeffrey L. *The History of Sukkot in the Second Temple and Rabbinic Periods*. Brown Judaic Studies 302. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995.
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- Smith, C. W. “Tabernacles in the Fourth Gospel and Mark.” *New Testament Studies* 9 (1963): 130–46.
- Ulfgard, Håkan. *The Story of Sukkot: The Setting, Shaping, and Sequel of the Biblical Feast of Tabernacles*. Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese 24. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998.
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- Wellhausen, Julius. *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel: with a reprint of the article “Israel” from the Encyclopedia Britannica*. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies, trans.; Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1885.

BENJAMIN M. AUSTIN

Barry, John D., et al., editors. *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, Lexham Press, 2016.

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THE FESTIVAL OF TABERNACLES

So important was the Festival of Tabernacles (also known as the Festival of Ingathering or the Festival of Booths) that Israel sometimes referred to it as “the festival of the LORD” (Judg. 21:19) or simply “the festival” (cf. 1 Kings 8:65). Held from the fifteenth to the twenty-first of the seventh month (September–October), this was the third of the three pilgrimage festivals. For that week, Israel lived in booths to remind them of their ancestors’ time in the wilderness. They also celebrated the fruit harvest. They were to “take the fruit of majestic trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice” before God for seven days (Lev. 23:40 NRSV). Avoiding all work on the first and last days of the festival, they were to mark the week with sacrifices, celebration, and joy. Also, every seventh year the law was to be read at this festival (Deut. 31:10–11).

The Mishnah, a collection of rabbinic laws compiled around AD 200 but often reflecting earlier traditions, records how Israel observed this festival during the early Roman period. As part of the celebration, men danced and sang in the courtyard of the temple while Levites, standing on the steps that led down from the court of the Israelites, played harps, lyres, cymbals, and other instruments. Two priests blew trumpets—one long blast, then a quavering one, then another long blast—while walking toward the eastern gate. When they reached the gate, they turned back toward the temple and said, “Our fathers when they were in this place turned with their backs toward the Temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, and they worshiped the sun toward the east [referring to the apostasy of the Jews as described by Ezekiel]; but as for us, our eyes are turned toward the Lord” (m. Sukkah 5:4). Another part of this festival involved the drawing of water for a libation offering from the Pool of Siloam with great ceremony and joy. John 7 records Jesus’ secretive departure to Jerusalem for the Festival of Tabernacles, where he spent several days teaching in the temple courts. It was on the last and greatest day of the festival when Jesus invited those thirsty to come to him and drink.

Longman, Tremper, III, et al., editors. *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Baker Books, 2013.
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TABERNACLES, FEAST OF

1. OT references.—In Ex 23:16, 34:22 it is called the Feast of Ingathering, and its date is placed at the end of the year.

In Dt 16:13–15 its name is given as the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths (possibly referring to the use of booths in the vineyard during the vintage). It is to last 7 days, to be observed at the central sanctuary, and to be an occasion of rejoicing. In the ‘year of release,’ i.e. the sabbatical year, the Law is to be publicly read (Dt 31:10–13). The dedication of Solomon’s Temple took place at this feast; in the account given in 1 K 8:66 the seven-day rule of Deut. is represented as being observed; but the parallel narrative of 2 Ch 7:8–10 assumes that the rule of Lev. was followed.

In Lv 23:34ff. and Nu 29:12–39 we find elaborate ordinances. The feast is to begin on 15th Tishri (October), and to last 8 days, the first and the last being days of holy convocation. The people are to live in booths improvised for the occasion. A very large number of offerings is ordained; on each of the first 7 days 2 rams and 14 lambs, and a goat as a sin-offering; and successively on these days a diminishing number of bullocks: 13 on the 1st day, 12 on the 2nd, and so on till the 7th, when 7 were to be offered. On the 8th day the special offerings were 1 bullock, 1 ram, 7 lambs, and a goat as a sin-offering.

We hear in Ezr 3:4 of the observance of this feast, but are not told the method. The celebration in Neh 8:16 followed the regulations of Lev., but we are expressly informed that such had not been the case since Joshua’s days. Still, the feast was kept in some way, for Jeroboam instituted its equivalent for the Northern Kingdom in the 8th month (1 K 12:32, 33).

2. Character of the feast.—It was the Jewish harvest-home, when all the year’s produce of corn, wine, and oil had been gathered in; though no special offering of the earth’s fruits was made, as was done at the Feasts of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost. (The reason was perhaps a desire to avoid the unseemly scenes of the Canaanite vintage-festival, by omitting such a significant point of resemblance; cf. Jg 9:27.) It was also regarded as commemorating the Israelites’ wanderings in the wilderness. It was an occasion for great joy and the giving of presents; It was perhaps the most popular of the national festivals, and consequently the most generally attended. Thus Zec 14:16 names as the future sign of Judah’s triumph the fact that all the world shall come up yearly to Jerusalem to keep this festival.

3. Later customs.—In later times novel customs were attached to the observance. Such were the daily procession round the altar, with its sevenfold repetition on the 7th day; the singing of special Psalms; the procession on each of the first 7 days to Siloam to fetch water, which was mixed with wine in a golden pitcher, and poured at the foot of the altar while trumpets were blown (cf. Jn 7:37); and the illumination of the women's court in the Temple by the lighting of the 4 golden candelabra (cf. Jn 8:12). The 8th day, though appearing originally as a supplementary addition to the feast, came to be regarded as an integral part of it, and is so treated in 2 Mac 10:6, as also by Josephus.

A. W. F. BLUNT.

Hastings, James, et al. Dictionary of the Bible, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909.

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TABERNACLES, FEAST OF

TABERNACLES, THE FEAST OF (Ex. 23:16, “the feast of ingathering”), the third of the three great festivals of the Hebrews, which lasted from the 15th till the 22d of Tisri.

The following are the principal passages in the Pentateuch which refer to it: Ex. 23:16; Lev. 23:34–36, 39–43; Num. 29:12–38; Deut. 16:13–15; 31:10–13. In Neh. 8 there is an account of the observance of the feast by Ezra. 2. The time of the festival fell in the autumn, when the whole of the chief fruits of the ground, the corn, the wine and the oil, were gathered in. Ex. 23:16; Lev. 23:39; Deut. 15:13–15. Its duration was strictly only seven days, Deut. 16:13; Ezek. 45:25; but it was followed by a day of holy convocation, distinguished by sacrifices of its own, which was sometimes spoken of as an eighth day. Lev. 23:36; Neh. 8:18. During the seven days the Israelites were commanded to dwell in booths or huts formed of the boughs of trees. The boughs were of the olive, palm, pine, myrtle, and other trees with thick foliage. Neh. 8:15–16. According to rabbinical tradition, each Israelite used to tie the branches into a bunch, to be carried in his hand, to which the name *lûlâb* was given. The burnt offerings of the Feast of Tabernacles were by far more numerous than those of any other festival. There were offered on each day two rams, fourteen lambs and a kid for a sin offering. But what was most peculiar was the arrangement of the sacrifices of bullocks, in all amounting to seventy. Num. 29:12–38. The eighth day was a day of holy convocation of peculiar solemnity. On the morning of this day the Hebrews left their huts and dismantled them, and took up their abode again in their houses. The special offerings of the day were a bullock, a ram, seven lambs, and a goat for a sin offering. Num. 29:36, 38. When the Feast of Tabernacles fell on a sabbatical year, portions of the law were read each day in public, to men, women, children, and strangers. Deut. 31:10–13. We find Ezra reading the law during the festival “day by day, from the first day to the last day.” Neh. 8:18. 3.

There are two particulars in the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles which appear to be referred to in the New Testament, but are not noticed in the Old. These were the ceremony of pouring out some water of the pool of Siloam and the display of some great lights in the court of the women. We are told that each Israelite, in holiday attire, having made up his *lûlâb*, before he broke his fast repaired to the temple with the *lûlâb* in one hand and the citron in the other, at the time of the ordinary morning sacrifice. The parts of the victim were laid upon the altar. One of the priests fetched some water in a golden ewer from the pool of Siloam, which he brought into the court through the water-gate. As he entered the trumpets sounded, and he ascended the slope of the altar. At the top of this were fixed two

silver basins with small openings at the bottom. Wine was poured into that on the eastern side, and the water into that on the western side, whence it was conducted by pipes into the Cedron. In the evening, both men and women assembled in the court of the women, expressly to hold a rejoicing for the drawing of the water of Siloam. At the same time there were set up in the court two lofty stands, each supporting four great lamps. These were lighted on each night of the festival. It appears to be generally admitted that the words of our Saviour, John 7:37–38—“If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water”—were suggested by the pouring out of the water of Siloam. But it is very doubtful what is meant by “the last day, that great day of the feast.” It would seem that either the last day of the feast itself, that is, the seventh, or the last day of the religious observances of the series of annual festivals, the eighth, must be intended. The eighth day may be meant, and then the reference of our Lord would be to an ordinary and well-known observance of the feast, though it was not, at the very time, going on. We must resort to some such explanation if we adopt the notion that our Lord’s words, John 8:12—“I am the light of the world”—refer to the great lamps of the festival.

Though all the Hebrew annual festivals were seasons of rejoicing, the Feast of Tabernacles was, in this respect, distinguished above them all. The huts and the *lûlâbs* must have made a gay and striking spectacle over the city by day, and the lamps, the *flambeaux*, the music, and the joyous gatherings in the court of the temple must have given a still more festive character to the night. The main purposes of the Feast of Tabernacles are plainly set forth in Ex. 23:16 and Lev. 23:43. It was to be at once a thanksgiving for the harvest and a commemoration of the time when the Israelites dwelt in tents during their passage through the wilderness. In one of its meanings, it stands in connection with the Passover, as the Feast of Abib, and with Pentecost, as the feast of harvest; in its other meaning, it is related to the Passover as the great yearly memorial of the deliverance from the destroyer and from the tyranny of Egypt. But naturally connected with this exultation in their regained freedom was the rejoicing in the more perfect fulfillment of God’s promise in the settlement of his people in the holy land. But the culminating point of this blessing was the establishment of the central spot of the national worship in the temple at Jerusalem. Hence it was evidently fitting that the Feast of Tabernacles should be kept with an unwonted degree of observance at the dedication of Solomon’s temple, 1 Kings 8:2, 65; Joseph. Ant. viii. 4, §5; again, after the rebuilding of the temple by Ezra, Neh. 8:13–18, and a third time by Judas Maccabæus when he had driven out the Syrians and restored the temple to the worship of Jehovah. 2 Macc. 10:5–8.

Smith, William. Smith's Bible Dictionary, Thomas Nelson, 1986.
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PENTECOST

PENTECOST (חג שבועות, *chg shb't*, “weeks”; πεντηκοστή, *pentēkostē*, “fiftieth”). In the Hebrew Bible, Pentecost is an annual harvest festival that occurs seven weeks after Passover. It became an important Christian holiday after God poured out the Holy Spirit upon the Jerusalem church on the first Pentecost after Christ’s resurrection.

Biblical Relevance

Pentecost in the Hebrew Bible

Leviticus 23:15–21 instructs the Israelites to hold an annual one-day harvest festival seven weeks, or 50 days, after Passover (see also Exod 34:22). This festival included extensive sacrifice (Lev 23:15–21; Deut 16:9–10; 2 Chr 8:13). At Pentecost, also known as the Feast of Weeks, Israelite farmers would start their journeys toward Jerusalem to present their firstfruit offerings (Wigoder, “Shavu’ot,” 707; Werblowsky, “Shavu’ot,” 628).

Pentecost in Acts

On the Pentecost immediately following Christ’s resurrection, God pours out (ἐκχέω, *ekcheō*) the Holy Spirit upon the Jerusalem church, thus enabling them to perform extraordinary deeds such as healings, speaking in tongues, prophesying, and inspired preaching. Fulfillment of Jesus’ promise of the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5, 8) occurs on Pentecost while the disciples are gathered in a house (Kee, *Good News*, 30). The Holy Spirit rushes into the house as a strong wind, and tongues of fire appear over each of the disciples. Fire is a conventional literary feature of theophanies (e.g., Exod 3:2; 2 Thess 1:8; 4 Ezra 13:10).

Fire and Sinai

At some point during the intertestamental period, the Jewish people had begun to observe Pentecost as a commemoration of the giving of the law at Mount Sinai—an event that involved a fiery theophany (Exod 19:18). VanderKam suggests that Acts 2 understands Pentecost to be a covenant renewal festival (VanderKam, “Covenant and Pentecost,” 239–254). Thus, Acts may be portraying the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 as the establishment of a covenant between God and the Church in a way reminiscent of the events on Sinai (Davis, “Acts 2,” 43–45; Witherington, *Acts*, 131).

Fulfillment of Joel

Peter quotes the Septuagint's translation of Joel 2:28–32, which prophesies that “in the last days,” God will “pour out” (ἐκχέω, ekcheō) the Holy Spirit upon all “flesh.” Thus, all humans—regardless of age, gender, and social status—will prophesy, have visions, and have prophetic dreams (Acts 2:17–18).

For Luke, the extraordinary events of Pentecost inaugurate the miracles and wonders that occur throughout Acts (Treier, “Fulfillment of Joel 2:28–32”). Later, the Holy Spirit also fills the Samaritan and Gentile converts, who then become participants in the same signs and wonders described in Peter's quotation of Joel (Acts 8:14–17, 25; 10:16–48; Conzelmann, Acts, 65, 84; Witherington, Acts, 134, 359–61).

Historical Development of Pentecost

Two separate but related Pentecost traditions developed among Jews and Christians.

Pentecost in Jewish Tradition

In Jewish tradition, Pentecost retained its connection with the annual harvest, but it also became a covenant renewal festival and a celebration of God giving the law.

By the middle of the second century BC, Pentecost had become a covenant renewal celebration (Jubilees 14.1–6; 15.1–16; 22.1–9; Kee, Good News, 30–31). At some point in the Graeco-Roman period, the festival became primarily a celebration of the giving of the law (b. Shabbat 88b; Witherington, Acts, 131). A revival of Pentecost as a harvest festival has occurred among modern Jews, especially among Israelis (New Encyclopedia of Judaism, “Shavu'ot,” 707–8). Historically, two traditions for the dating of Pentecost exist. The Sadducees and Karaites understood “Sabbath” in Lev 23:15 to refer to the Saturday after Passover; thus, Pentecost would always be on a Sunday, but never on the same date every year. However, Rabbinic Judaism has understood “Sabbath” to refer to Passover; thus, since at least the second century AD, Pentecost typically begins on 6 Sivan (Wigoder, “Shavu'ot,” 707).

Later Traditions

Christian tradition has remembered Pentecost as the day God sent the Holy Spirit unto the Church. In the Christian liturgical calendar, Pentecost is 50 days after Easter. It serves as a commemoration of the coming of the Holy Spirit and the founding of the Church (Unger, “Significance of Pentecost,”

169–77). Within the Charismatic movement, particularly Pentecostalism, the day of Pentecost carries important theological significance as the inaugural occurrence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Alexander, “Bishop King and Pentecostalism,” 159–83).

RONALD D. ROBERTS

Barry, John D., et al., editors. *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, Lexham Press, 2016.

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PENTECOST

The word ‘pentecost’ means ‘fifty’, and comes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It refers to the Israelite harvest festival that was held fifty days after Passover. In the Old Testament this festival is called the Feast of Harvest, the Feast of Firstfruits and the Feast of Weeks. In the New Testament it is called the Feast of Pentecost (Lev 23:5–6, 15–16; Acts 2:1; 20:16; 1 Cor 16:8; for details see FEASTS).

Pentecost is significant in the New Testament story because on that day the church was born. Christ the Passover lamb had been sacrificed; then, fifty days later, God poured out his Spirit on that small group of disciples who were the firstfruits of his new people, the church of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:1–4; cf. 1 Cor 5:7). (Concerning the extraordinary happenings that day see BAPTISM WITH THE SPIRIT; TONGUES.)

Fleming, Don. AMG Concise Bible Dictionary, AMG Publishers, 1990.

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Pentecost

Word derived from the Greek word *pentēkostē* (fiftieth) which stood for the festival celebrated on the 50th day after Passover. In the OT this festival, called Shavuoth (Weeks) in Judaism, is referred to as the Feast of Weeks (Ex 34:22; Dt 16:10) because it occurs 7 weeks after Passover. Other names include “the Feast of Harvest” (Ex 23:16) because of its relationship with harvest season and “the Day of First Fruits” (Nm 28:26) because two loaves of newly ground grain were presented before the Lord. This latter name, however, should be distinguished from the offering of first fruits at the beginning of the harvest season as mentioned in Leviticus 23:9–14.

The Feast of Weeks was one of three OT pilgrimage festivals when individuals were to appear before the Lord with gifts and offerings (Ex 23:14–17). The festival was primarily a harvest festival and celebrated the end of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest. Traditionally, grain harvest extended from Passover, when the first grain was cut (Dt 16:9) around mid-April, to Pentecost which marked its conclusion in mid-June. Josephus’ statement that Pentecost was called “closing” illustrates this understanding (Antiq. 3.10.6).

Each year the priest waved a sheaf of newly harvested grain before the Lord on the day after the sabbath during the Festival of Unleavened Bread (the period of 7 days following Passover). The people then counted 50 days from the offering of that first sheaf of grain until the day after the seventh sabbath to observe the Feast of Weeks (Lv 23:11). On this day 2 loaves made of 2/10 of an ephah of flour and baked with yeast were waved before the Lord (Lv 23:17) and freewill offerings were encouraged (Dt 16:10). In addition to the agricultural produce which represented thanksgiving for God's blessing, during harvest burnt offerings of various animals were prescribed (Lv 23:18; Nm 28:27). This harvest festival was a time of great rejoicing and a holy assembly when no work was to be done (Lv 23:21; Dt 16:11). Observance of the Feast of Weeks during Solomon's time (2 Chr 8:13) is the only OT reference outside of the Pentateuch, for Ezekiel makes no mention of it in his calendar for future festivals (Ez 45; 46).

Pentecost is first mentioned in the NT as the occasion for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples of Christ, an event which many theologians understand as marking the beginning of the church (Acts 2:1). Since this was a required festival Jews had gathered from great distances to observe Pentecost in Jerusalem, making it an appropriate time for God's work. On two occasions Paul takes into consideration the Festival of Pentecost when anticipating his travels. In the first instance he writes to the Corinthians about delaying his visit to them until after Pentecost (1 Cor 16:8) while later he is desirous of traveling to Jerusalem in time for Pentecost (Acts 20:16).

Judaism today celebrates the giving of the Law at Sinai on Shavuot in addition to aspects of the harvest. After the destruction of the temple in AD 70 this association, which was supported from Exodus 19:1, where it is stated that the Law was given three months after the first Passover, became stronger and is now a central part of the festival. In addition to readings from the Pentateuch, the Book of Ruth is read because of its harvest background. Much later in Judaism this festival came to commemorate the anniversary of David's death so the Psalms are read as well.

Christians annually celebrate Pentecost on a designated Sunday on the assumption that 50 days from Passover to the Feast of Weeks were counted until the day after the seventh sabbath (our Sunday) as prescribed by Leviticus 23:15, 16. According to some Jewish interpreters, however, the sabbath of Leviticus was not the sabbath day but the holy day of Passover which fell on a different day each year. Following this view, which was supported by the Pharisees, the Feast of Weeks was observed on a different day each year rather than the day after the seventh sabbath. While the early church

celebrated God's gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, in time it became a popular occasion for baptisms. The white dress of the candidates gave rise to the name Whitsunday (White Sunday) in Christian tradition.

Elwell, Walter A., and Barry J. Beitzel. Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, Baker Book House, 1988.

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