

The Feasts of Israel

The annual feasts of Israel offer great insights into the Jewish roots of the Christian faith as they unfold God's plan of redemption throughout the ages. Leviticus 23 lists these seven feasts in the order of their seasonal observance: **Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Weeks, Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Booths.**

Each holiday has

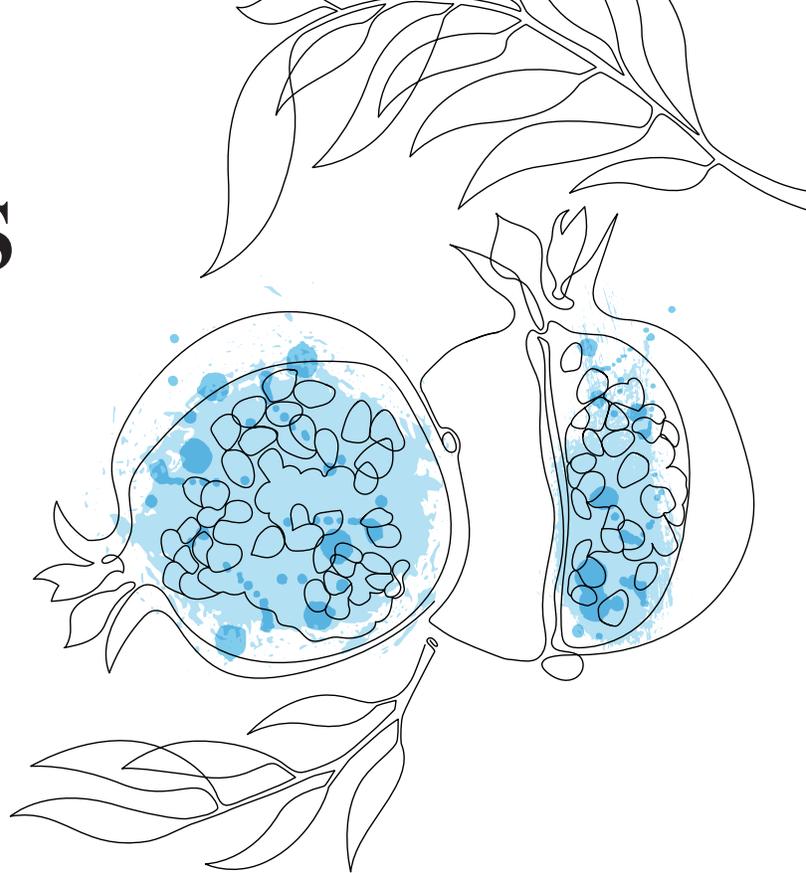
- a seasonal aspect
- a memorial aspect celebrating God's faithfulness to the Jewish people
- a prophetic aspect

Passover

Passover, in Hebrew, *Pesach* (pronounced *Pay sakh*), is the first and probably best known feast. It comes in the spring, in the Jewish month of Nisan, also called Aviv. Passover commemorates the redemption of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. Even today, Jewish people have a celebratory meal and liturgy called a Seder (pronounced *Say dur*) remembering how the blood of the Passover lamb was sprinkled on the crosspiece and sideposts of the door so that the "Angel of Death" would pass over. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God. His sacrifice can set us free from the sin that holds us captive (John 1:29). The meal that many know as the Last Supper was actually a Passover celebration. Jesus used the holiday as an occasion to picture the sacrifice He was about to make and to provide a way to remember it. To this day, followers of Jesus who take communion are hearkening back to Jesus' words at Passover.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins the day after Passover and lasts for seven days. As it's so closely related to Passover, the names of the two holidays are often interchanged. During Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Jewish people remove all leaven from their homes and eat unleavened bread, or *matzah*. Leaven in Scripture is sometimes a symbol for sin because of the way it spreads, perpetuates itself, and puffs things up. Because of Jesus, we can be released from the self-perpetuating sin cycle.



For those who know Jesus, *matzah* graphically portrays His pure and sinless nature. The *matzah* is pierced, even as Jesus was pierced by the nails in His hands and feet and the Roman spear in His side; and it is striped in the baking process, reminding us that Isaiah said, "He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities . . . and with his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

The Feast of Firstfruits

The Feast of Firstfruits, in Hebrew, *Hag HaBikkurim* (*Hag* pronounced with a *ch* sound as in Bach: *Chag ha bik kur reem*), is celebrated the day after the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In Bible times, it was a feast of thanksgiving for the barley harvest, the first grain of the season. The first harvest is viewed as a promise of the larger harvest to come. It is significant that Jesus rose from the dead on this holiday. Just as the barley harvest was the promise of more to come, He is our firstfruits, the promise of resurrection and eternal life for those who trust Him (1 Corinthians 15:20).

The Feast of Weeks

The Feast of Weeks, in Hebrew, *Shavuot* (pronounced *Shah voo oat*), is also known by the Greek word **Pentecost** because it comes 50 days after the Passover Sabbath. *Shavuot* was also a harvest festival to thank God for the wheat harvest. According to Jewish tradition, it is also the day that Moses received the law on Mount Sinai. The first *Shavuot*/Pentecost after the death and resurrection of Jesus is regarded

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by Christians as the birthday of the church. In Bible times, the priests offered two loaves of bread made from newly harvested grain. For believers, this can symbolize God's people, both Jews and Gentiles, made one in the Messiah, Jesus.

The long gap before the next feast might be seen as our present age, waiting for the return of our Redeemer, Messiah Jesus.

The Feast of Trumpets

The Feast of Trumpets, in Hebrew, *Yom Teruah* (pronounced *Yome Teh roo ah*), comes in autumn, on Tishrei, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar. Today, it is commonly called Rosh Hashanah, and is known as the Jewish New Year, marking the beginning of the civil year. God commanded the blowing of trumpets on this day to call the congregation of Israel together for a very solemn assembly. According to Jewish teachings, Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of 10 days of judgment when the righteous are written into the Book of Life, the wicked are condemned, and those who are not wholly righteous or wholly wicked are given 10 days to repent and thus escape judgment. We who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life do not fear judgment, but draw near to God with confidence (Hebrews 4:14–16).

The Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement, in Hebrew, *Yom Kippur* (*Yome kee poor*), is the most solemn day of the Jewish year. It was the only time in Bible days when a person, specifically the high priest, could enter the Holy of Holies. An elaborate ritual that required ceremonial purification (special washing and clothing), as well as sacrifices made according to very detailed prescriptions, made it possible for the priest to ask forgiveness, first for his own sin, and then for the sins of the people. But there is no longer a Temple and therefore, no animal sacrifices. Yom Kippur has become a time of fasting and prayer. People hope that repentance will suffice for forgiveness of sins, but they have no assurance that God has heard and forgiven them, for the Scriptures teach in Leviticus 17:11 that atonement is in the blood. When Christ offered His own blood as our atonement, or covering, the veil of

the Temple was torn in two, signifying that He had opened the way into the Holy of Holies.

The Feast of Tabernacles

The Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths) is the seventh and final annual feast. In Hebrew, it is *Sukkot* (*Soo kote*). In Bible days, this was the final fall harvest festival, a time of ingathering at Jerusalem. The Jewish people built booth-like structures and lived in them during this feast as a reminder of the temporary dwellings that were a way of life for our ancestors during the 40 years of wilderness wanderings. Today, many Jewish people still build open-roofed, three-sided huts and decorate them with tree boughs and autumn fruits for this festival.



Everyone in Israel who was able, came up to Jerusalem for this harvest festival every year. The Temple worship for the holiday included the ritual pouring of water from the pool of Siloam, symbolic of the prayers for the winter rains. It was at this time that Jesus cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink" (John 7:37).

John wrote in Revelation 21:3: "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."

The Sabbath

There is one more holy time, but it is weekly, not annually. The Sabbath, which falls every seventh day, was to be a "sign" to Israel "that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctifies you" (Exodus 31:13). This national day of rest reminds the Jewish people that God rested after creation (Exodus 20:11), and rest is therefore holy. Also the exodus enabled Israel to enjoy rest following generations of slavery (Deuteronomy 5:15).

As believers in Jesus, we look forward to eternal "rest." We will no longer struggle with sin, but in God's presence, we will find never-ending refreshment and joy. The future fulfillment of the Sabbath, like the future fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles, will transform the remembrance of what God has done into the fullness of His promises, kept perfectly throughout eternity.

To see more articles on these feasts, go to www.jewsforjesus.org/judaica

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FEASTS	SEASON	ORIGINAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR ISRAEL	PROPHETIC SIGNIFICANCE	BIBLICAL PROMISE	FULFILLMENT
Pesach Passover/ Unleavened Bread	Spring The first of three pilgrimage festivals held in Jerusalem	Redemption from bondage in Egypt Purging of all leaven (symbol of sin)	Believers in Christ redeemed from bondage of sin All believers in Christ cleansed from sin and empowered to walk in newness of life	You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (1 Peter 1:18–19) Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump. . . . For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. (1 Corinthians 5:7) [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)	Redemption through the crucifixion
Hag HaBikkurim Firstfruits	Spring First of grain harvest	Thanksgiving for firstfruits The promise of the harvest to come (first of the grain presented to God)	Christ, the first to rise from the dead—the promise of resurrection and eternal life for all who believe in Him	“But now Christ is risen from the dead . . . the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. . . . Even so in Christ all shall be made alive.” (1 Corinthians 15:20 and 22)	The resurrection of Christ
Shavuot Feast of Weeks (Pentecost)	Late spring, seven weeks after Passover The second of three pilgrimage festivals held in Jerusalem	The ingathering of the first harvest	Thanksgiving for first harvest and (according to tradition) the time of the giving of the Law at Sinai God’s first harvest of those redeemed in Christ, both Jews and Gentiles God’s law written on the hearts of the redeemed	When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. . . . And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:1, 4) And there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:41) I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds. (Hebrews 10:16, quoting Jeremiah 31:33)	The coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church



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Yom Teruah Feast of Trumpets	Early autumn	A solemn assembly when trumpets are blown to prepare for the Day of Atonement	The beginning of the regathering of Israel to the Land in preparation for the final Day of Atonement The assembly of all believers, dead and alive, in the heavens with Christ	Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation. I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety. (Jeremiah 32:37) For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. . . . Then we . . . will be caught up together . . . to meet the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17; see also 1 Corinthians 15:52)	Israel regathered The rapture of the church and the return of Christ
Yom Kippur Day of Atonement	Autumn The third of three pilgrimage festivals held in Jerusalem	A solemn assembly for repentance and forgiveness under the Law	Believers in Christ forgiven by one Atonement for all time Israel will repent and look to her Messiah in one day	So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many. (Hebrews 9:28) And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. . . . On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and . . . Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness. (Zechariah 12:10; 13:1)	Israel turns to her Messiah
Sukkot Feast of Booths	Autumn Final harvest	Joyful harvest celebration and memorial of tabernacles in the wilderness	All peoples brought under the rulership of the King Messiah	Then everyone who survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Booths. (Zechariah 14:16)	The kingdom of God on earth
Shabbat Sabbath	Weekly	A sign of God's covenant and a day of rest from labor	Though we have entered partly into the "rest" promised to God's people (Matthew 11:28), we will not enter it fully until the Lord returns	There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. (Hebrews 4:9)	Eternity