

ONE **FOR** ISRAEL  
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# DISCOVER *ישוע* Jesus IN THE BIBLICAL CALENDAR

A guide to the **Jewish** festivals  
and how they point to **Jesus**

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## INTRODUCTION

*“While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease” (Genesis 8:22).*

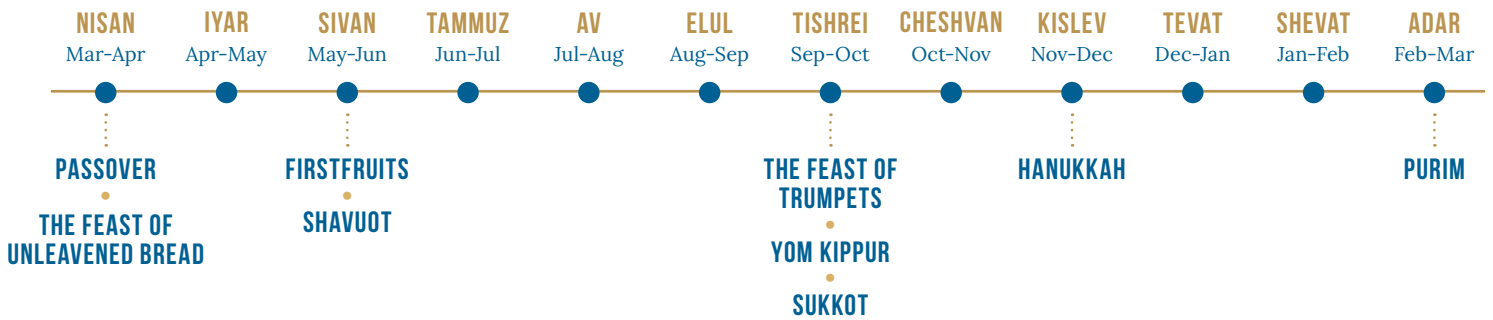
The word for “feast” is *moed* (מוֹעֵד), based on the root word, יָעַד. That is, something with an end goal, with a fixed time, and designated for a certain purpose. Moed is usually translated as “appointed time,” or “set feast.” Each feast (or holy day) marks an aspect of God’s plan of salvation for mankind, through Messiah Jesus. The feasts point to events that happened in the past, and also to real events that will happen in the future. In other words, each appointed time has a double meaning—both immediate and prophetic. Just as the earthly tabernacle was built according to the pattern of the heavenly one, so the feasts in the Torah are like shadows, pointing to real future events.

When we learn about the feasts, we must remember that they work together to tell one story: God’s plan of salvation for mankind. Each feast marks an aspect within the salvation plan of Messiah Jesus, which includes the atonement of sins, the cleansing of Israel from its impurity, and its return to the original role for which God chose it—a kingdom of priests and a holy nation among the nations.

Why did God give us set feasts and holy days? Again, we have an answer with a double meaning. First, they are meant to give us a break from everyday life and to mark different events and seasons in the agricultural year. However, the real and more important purpose is to tell us about God’s overarching story of redemption. The appointed times serve as signs that speak of great and eternal things fulfilled in Messiah Jesus. They are meant to help us direct our hearts to our God and remind us of the purpose of our lives: to bring glory to Him. Here we will look at the significance of the biblical feasts—past, present, and future—and their prophetic meaning in God’s plan of salvation for Israel and humanity.

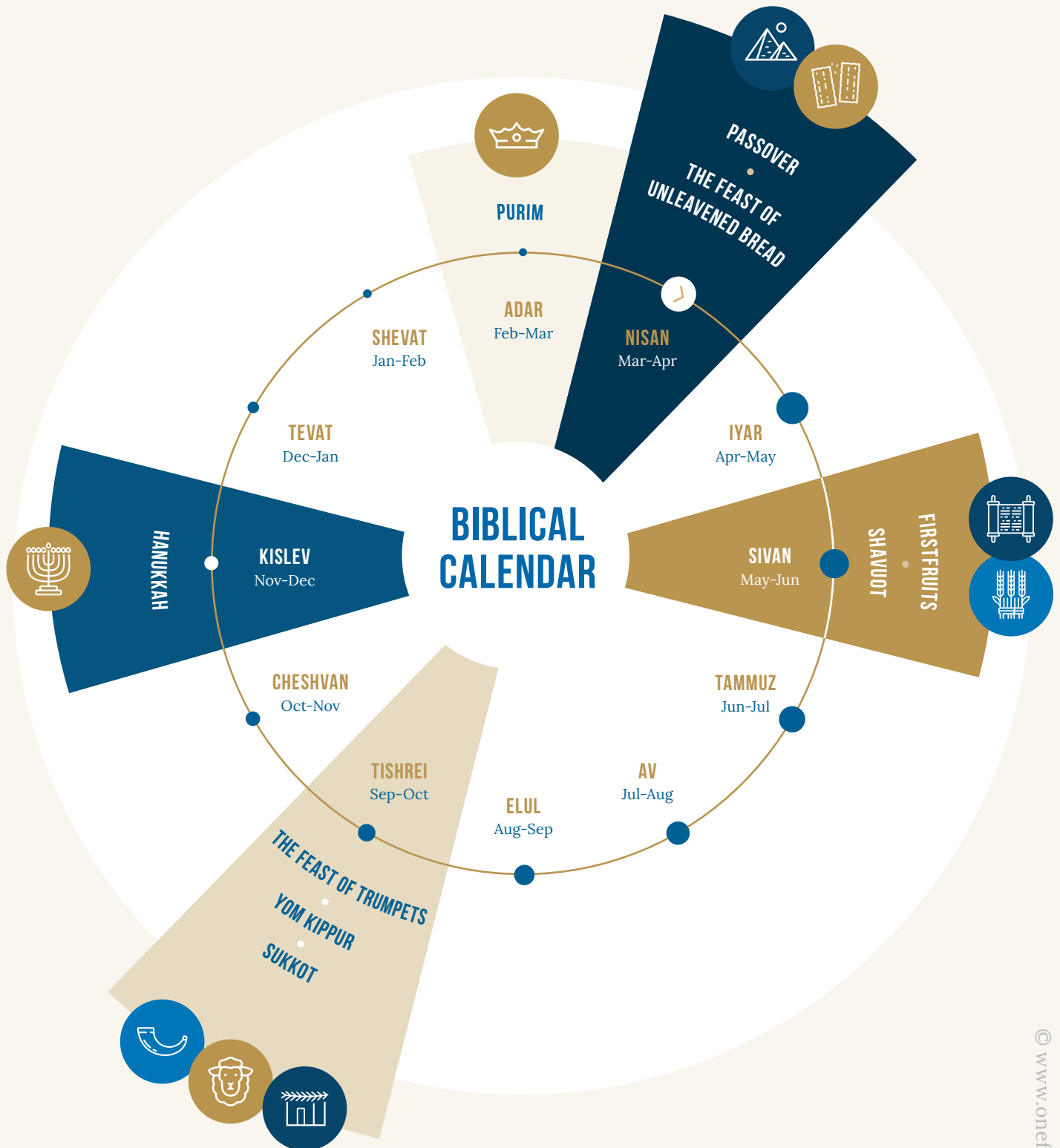
## LEVITICUS 23 AS A PATTERN

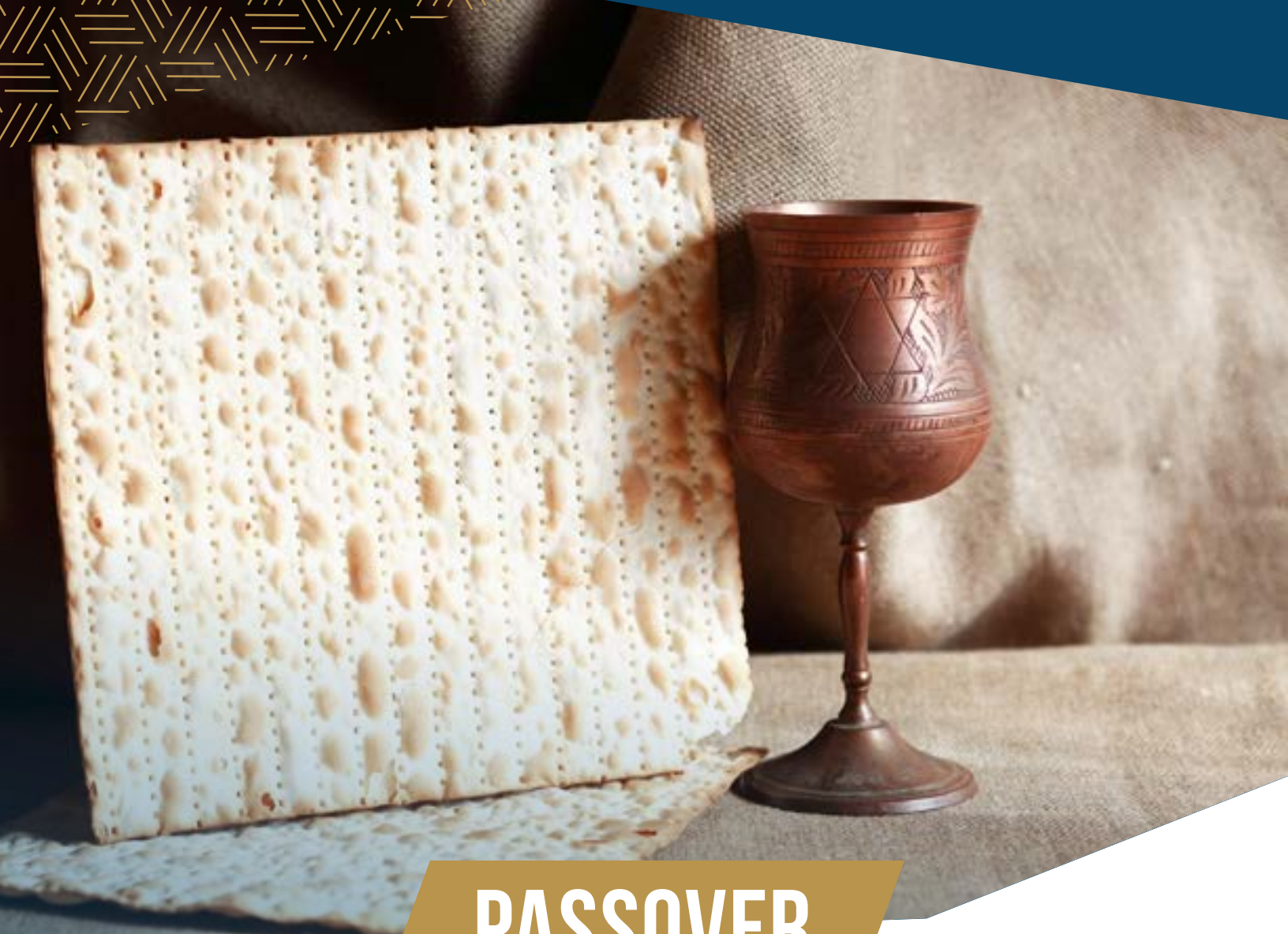
God commands His people to hold special activities on these appointed days designed to prepare them to experience the fulfillment associated with the Messiah. Carrying out the activities at the exact times set by God was to help the people of Israel to recognize the true Messiah and understand the purposes of His first and second coming. After establishing the Sabbath as an appointed time with God each week, Leviticus 23 lays out all the annual feasts in order, so let's walk through them one by one.



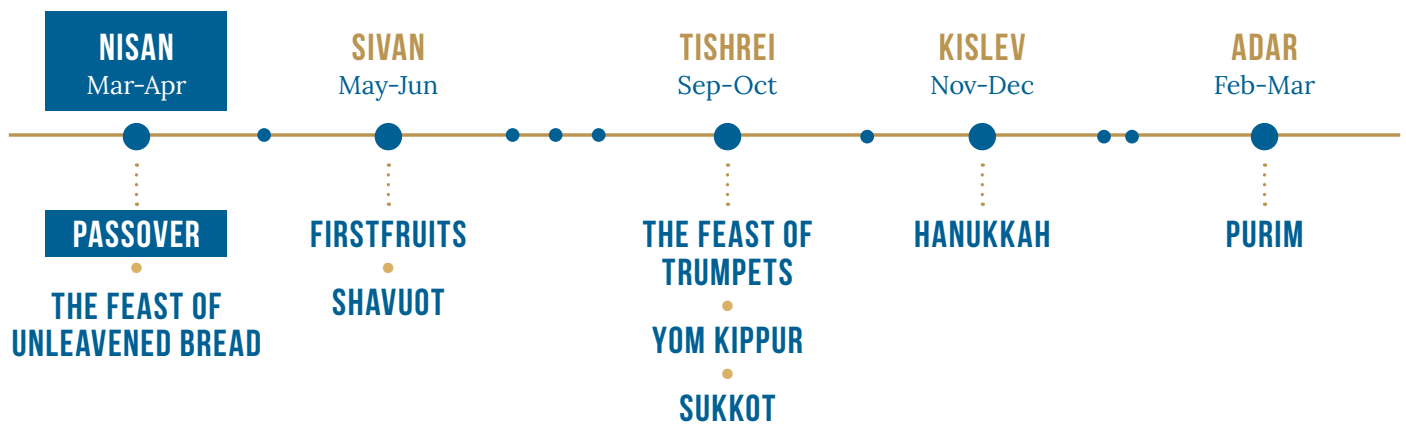
**"לְכָל זָמַן וָעֵת לְכָל חֵפֶץ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם" (קהלת ג' 1)**

**"To every thing there is a **season**, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" (Ecc 3:1)**





# PASSOVER



Read more about Passover and the biblical feasts.



*“These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD’s Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work” (Leviticus 23:4-7).*


Passover is the first and foremost of the Jewish feasts. It celebrates the Exodus from Egypt, and marks the beginning of the biblical calendar. In ancient times, the peoples of the Near East region would typically begin their year according to the agricultural cycle when the first rains began in the fall. These early winter rains are called the “yoreh” in Hebrew, and come after the Fall Feast of Ingathering (also known as the Feast of Tabernacles) “at the end of the year” according to Exodus 23:16. But the Lord changed even the way Israel would mark time, in complete contrast with our neighbors, by making the start of the year in the springtime. God declares that,

*“This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you” (Exodus 12:2).*

Henceforth, Israel’s calendar would begin in the spring, or “Aviv” (Exodus 13:4), the month when the Jewish people were miraculously delivered from Egypt. Initially, Aviv was simply called “the first month,” but today it is known as the month of Nisan. Passover is the foundational holiday in Israel’s religious calendar because the Exodus was the foundational event for Israel as a nation. The Exodus appears in the Hebrew Scriptures as the archetype of Israel’s national redemption. Over 50 times in the Tanakh (the Old Testament Scriptures) the Lord is described as “the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt.” However, the Bible says this national redemption would be surpassed by the ingathering of Israel’s exiles from the four corners of the earth, and that Israel would be restored as a nation and blessed in the land in the latter days.

*“Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when they shall no longer say, ‘As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ but ‘As the LORD lives who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.’ Then they shall dwell in their own land” (Jeremiah 23:7-8).*

The Passover feast therefore not only celebrated God's past act of redemption, but anticipated the great future redemption to come. The Jewish people expected the final Messianic redemption to come during the month of Passover, Nisan. An early Jewish midrash held that, "In Nisan the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt; and in Nisan in the future the Jewish people will be redeemed in the final redemption" (Rosh HaShana 11b). As the first redemption from Egypt took place at Passover, so the final Messianic redemption would take place at Passover time. Since Elijah was known to be the harbinger of the coming day of the Lord (according to Malachi 4:5-6), it was anticipated that he would appear at Passover to announce the imminent coming of the Messiah to redeem His people. This is why Elijah the prophet plays a prominent role in the "Haggadah," the guidebook to celebrating Passover used by Jewish people all over the world.



The Passover celebration in ancient Israel was a reflection of the original Passover miracle that happened on the night of the Exodus. According to Exodus 12, every Israelite household in Egypt was to choose a lamb without blemish and sacrifice it on the fourteenth day of the first month. Taking blood from that lamb, they would mark the doorposts and the lintel of the house. God instructed Moses that the firstborn of every household would be killed, but when the Destroyer would see the blood on the doorposts of Israel, he would pass over the house, and their firstborn sons would be safe. Meanwhile, each family would eat the roasted lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, dressed and ready for immediate departure once God had struck Egypt with the tenth and final plague (12:3-13).

In Exodus 12:14-20, God instructed Israel to reenact that first Passover every year using the same basic elements in their celebration, followed by seven days of eating only unleavened bread. The eating of unleavened bread would remind the people of the haste with which they fled Egypt, not having time to leaven their dough (Exodus 12:39). The seven-day feast of Passover would be an opportunity to remind the next generation of the great act of redemption God had performed when He set Israel free from Egyptian bondage and brought them to Himself (Exodus 12: 24-27 and 19:4). Over time, and particularly following the Temple's destruction in 70 AD, new elements were added to the basic structure of the "seder," or ceremonial meal, such as reclining the table, the singing of psalms, four cups of wine, four questions, and so on. Some of these elements were already evident in Jesus's celebration of the Passover with His disciples on the eve of His crucifixion (see Luke 22:7, 14-20 and Matthew 26:30).

In the wisdom and plan of God, the Messiah Jesus, our ultimate Redeemer, would provide the Passover sacrifice for all humanity through His crucifixion. It was John the Baptist who had initially identified Jesus as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29)! Later, Paul the apostle would write, “Cleanse out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Corinthians 5:7). But it was Jesus Himself who linked His sacrificial death with the Passover lamb at that final Passover seder with His disciples.

Following the destruction of the Temple in the first century, there was no holy place for Israel to bring Passover lambs for slaughter. As a result, the Jewish people ceased to include lamb in their Passover celebrations. Instead, towards the end of their seder, one piece of unleavened bread would be eaten by all as the final portion of their Passover meal. This piece of matzah, called the “afikoman,” would represent the lamb. Anticipating this development, Jesus took a piece of unleavened bread after the meal and used it to identify His body with the Passover lamb sacrificed for the redemption of Israel. Jesus said, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19).

Similarly, Jesus identified Himself with the other crucial element of the seder meal in the first century: the wine. In the Mishnah we are told that four cups of wine were to be drunk during the Passover celebration. These four cups would be drunk, two before the meal and two afterwards, as part of the Passover seder. Ancient Jewish tradition identified these four cups with the four aspects of redemption recounted in Exodus 6:6-7. There we read,

*“Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.’”*

## THE FOUR CUPS REPRESENT THESE STAGES OF GOD'S RESCUE PLAN:

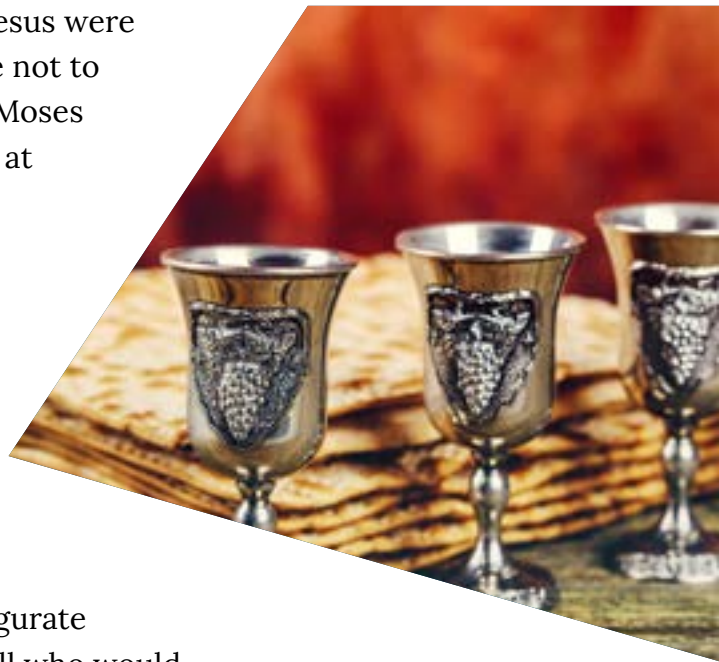
1. I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.
2. I will deliver you from slavery to them.
3. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and great acts of judgment.
4. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God.

Jesus identified the third cup of wine, the “cup of redemption,” with His blood, which was about to be shed:

*“And likewise [He took] the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood’” (Luke 22:20).*

By identifying the third cup of wine with His shed blood, Jesus gave a new double significance to the “cup of redemption.” The blood of the Passover lamb, applied to the doorposts and lintel, had redeemed Israel from death and led to her deliverance from Egypt. So also Jesus, by His death on the cross, would provide for the forgiveness of sins—the prerequisite for redemption and entrance into the kingdom of God. Significantly, John the Apostle, in describing the crucifixion, is careful to note that the legs of Jesus were not broken, just as the Passover lamb's bones were not to be broken (John 19:33, 36 cf. Exodus 12:46). When Moses inaugurated the covenant between Israel and God at Sinai, he first offered up a pure sacrifice.

*“And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words’” (Exodus 24:8).*



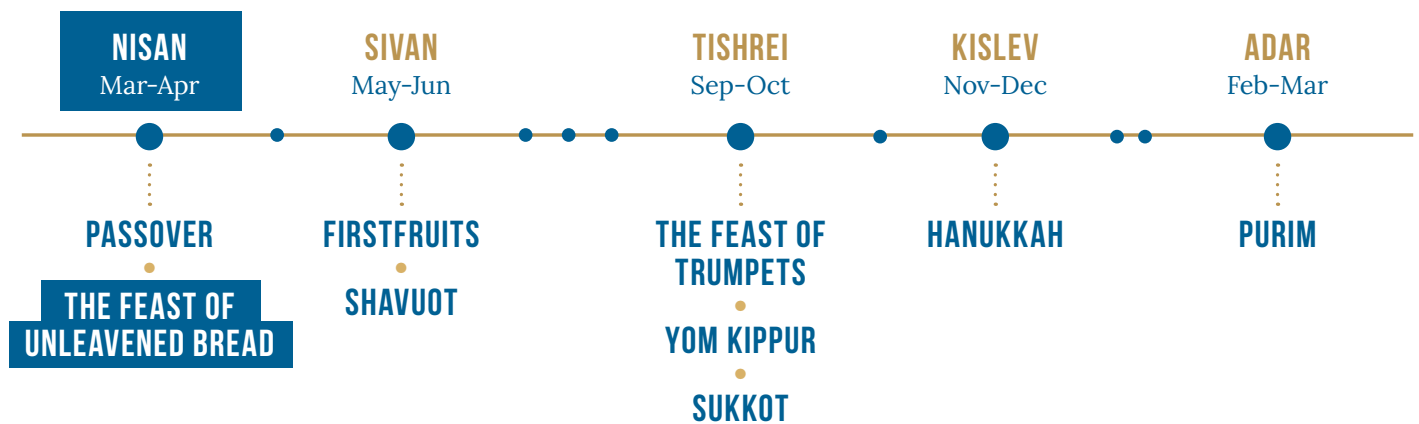
Likewise, the self-sacrifice of Jesus served to inaugurate the New Covenant spoken of in Jeremiah 31 with all who would accept the “sprinkling” of His blood. According to the prophet Jeremiah, the New Covenant would provide forgiveness and purification for the nation of Israel as a condition for life in the Messianic kingdom (Jeremiah 31:31-34). It is only later that the way is opened up for all nations to become grafted into Israel and join that same

covenant. The prophet Ezekiel adds that this transformation of Israel as a nation would follow the regathering of the exiles and would be accomplished by the indwelling of the Spirit of God (Ezekiel 36:22-30). But Jesus revealed that the heirs of the kingdom, those who acknowledge Him as Messiah and Lord, would enter into the covenant and share in its blessings even prior to the age to come. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Passover festival in every aspect. He Himself became our “Passover lamb” and was slain to make death “pass over” all who trust in the blood that He shed for us. His sacrifice has redeemed us from slavery to sin, and He offers new life to all who believe. Through this victory, He offers us His Spirit to live in us as an ever-present and daily blessing. Jesus will also complete His Passover role when the Lamb of God returns as the Lion of Judah to redeem Israel and establish His Kingdom on the earth.





# THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD



Read more about unleavened bread and the biblical feasts.



The Feast of Unleavened Bread happens immediately after the Passover:

*“In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD’s Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. But you shall present a food offering to the LORD for seven days. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work” (Leviticus 23:5-8).*

It is to remind the house of Israel of God’s commandments regarding yeast, or leaven, as He prepared them for the dramatic Exodus rescue. God told Moses what they must do, back in Exodus 12:14-15 before the event happened, and told them that they must continue to purge their houses from yeast each year as a commemoration:

*“This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.”*

And again, just in the very next chapter:

*“Then Moses said to the people, ‘Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the LORD brought you out from this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out. And when the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this service in this month. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD. Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen with you, and no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory. You shall tell your son on that day, ‘It is because*

*of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.' And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth. For with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt" (Exodus 13:3-9).*

Today in Israel, the run-up to this feast means a big spring clean! People thoroughly clean their houses to get rid of any possibility of yeast, and clear any leaven-related products out of their fridges, freezers, and cupboards. Rabbinic rulings on what falls into this category have become more and more strict, but most traditional or religious Jewish families will do some sort of clean out at this time. It is also traditional to burn some bread, with prayers and blessings before the festival begins.

If you come to Israel at Passover time, you will notice that large sections of supermarkets are closed off and entire aisles covered over since products that are not "kosher for Passover" cannot be sold for the week. Cake bakers have to get creative with other ingredients, and people all munch matzos (cracker-like sheets of unleavened bread) for the duration of the seven-day feast. It is a practical way to remember how Israel was rescued from Egypt from generation to generation. God emphasizes it many times: the removal of yeast must be thorough and it is not just for one day, but for a whole week. God says it is just like a reminder on the hand or the forehead: the Feast of Unleavened Bread is a tangible reminder of how He brought Israel out of slavery and suffering.

When looking at how the Feast of Unleavened Bread is fulfilled in Jesus, it's good to reflect on why the feast was commanded in the first place. Deuteronomy 16:3 gives this reason:

*"You shall eat no leavened bread with it. Seven days you shall eat it with unleavened bread, the bread of affliction—for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste—that all the days of your life you may remember the day when you came out of the land of Egypt."*

The Israelites did indeed have to leave in haste, and were told there wasn't time to allow the dough to rise before they had to go. They were told to eat with their garments tucked in and ready to run. But there is a strange fact here: Moses received the instructions about what the people of Israel needed to do at the beginning of the



month, and the night that the Angel of Death passed over was the fourteenth of the month—14 days later. The Israelites had a good two weeks to prepare. That's plenty of time to plan ahead if you want your dough to rise! Certainly, the emphasis on haste was important when we reflect upon Israel's sudden redemption, and the unleavened bread is a good metaphor for that, but could there be more meaning to the lack of yeast than just a shortage of time? The New Testament often helps us to interpret some of these deeper meanings, as we find out how they are fulfilled in Jesus. Here is how Paul writes about yeast:

*“Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth”*  
(1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

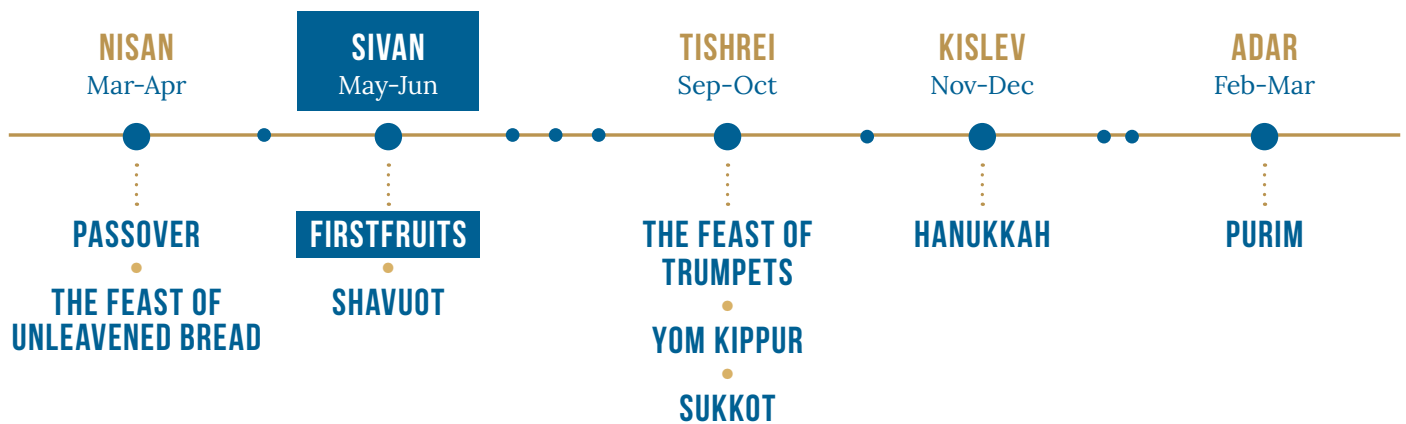
We see a pattern of yeast representing sin, and used as a metaphor for how it spreads and contaminates. The idea of being “puffed up” is linked with the sin of pride and arrogance. Paul here clearly equates yeast with wickedness and sin, and is speaking directly about the Passover event and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

In Deuteronomy, unleavened bread is called “the bread of our affliction.” It is not puffed up, but the opposite—entirely flat; a metaphor for humility, suffering, and poverty. Some have also noted that there are stripes across each matzo, and that they are pierced with holes that you can see through. This unleavened bread symbolizes our sinless Passover lamb; humble, afflicted, striped, and pierced, and there was no trace of sin to be found in Him. No yeast, and no sin. Isaiah 53 gives us this picture of our spotless, Passover lamb:

*“Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed”*  
(Isaiah 53:4-5).



# FIRSTFRUITS



Read more about Firstfruits  
and the biblical feasts.



*“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. ... And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings” (Leviticus 23:9-11, 14).*

On the Sunday immediately following the first Shabbat of Passover, Israel was commanded to bring the firstfruits of the barley harvest, a bundle (Hebrew: “omer”) of the new ears of grain, and to present them as a wave offering at God’s sanctuary. The waving of the firstfruits, embedded within Passover week, recognized God’s ongoing, present “redemption” as He provided life for His people Israel by the fruitfulness of the land that He gave them. Seven weeks later, the fields were full of all the grain ready for harvest. Firstfruits is a way to say thank-you to God for the blessings that will come in seven weeks. By celebrating the firstfruits with faith, the people can return to their homes in peace, believing God will fill their fields with a harvest in seven weeks and sustain their lives.

The firstfruit is not to be confused with the tithe. The tithe is ten percent of something, but the firstfruit is one hundred percent of something different. Ancient Israel was of course an agricultural society, and God said very clearly that the firstborn of any animal in the household—and even children—was to be dedicated to Him. In other words, “You give Me the firstfruits, and I’ll bless the rest.” The crops of the field were the same. God said, “You give me the firstfruits of your field, and I will bless the rest of the harvest.” Why is that so? Giving the firstfruits is difficult, because it requires faith. If you give the first, you don’t know whether or not you’re going to have more later. You might be giving away the only thing you’re going to get, or at least in our head it seems that way. But God says if we give Him the firstfruits, He will bless the rest of the harvest. In ancient Israel, the most important harvest was the wheat and barley harvest. Here’s how it used to be done: Passover begins at sundown on the fourteenth of the month of Nisan, when the Passover meal is celebrated. The next morning, it’s still the Passover day, and the farmer goes to his fields. He takes with him a pile of ribbons or bands with a very bright color. He goes around his fields, and he looks to find every stalk of grain that has budded. Then he marks them by tying a ribbon or band around them. He marks all the stalks that have budded on the first day of the Passover. And then for the next 50 days he works his fields, and right before

Pentecost he goes around his field just before he's going to gather in his harvest, and he cuts first the marked stalks of grain. He collects the marked grain—all of it—not just ten percent, but all of the marked grain is the firstfruits, and it belongs to the Lord. This requires an element of faith, but it all belongs to the Lord.

In the New Testament, Paul connects the Feast of Firstfruits to the resurrection of Jesus. The waving of the firstfruits speaks to us about the hope of the resurrection of the dead—first of all for our Messiah after His atoning sacrifice, and also for us! What a blessed hope. The resurrection of Messiah is conclusive proof that His sacrifice once and for all was willingly and fully accepted forever! First Corinthians 15 is a chapter devoted entirely to the discussion about the resurrection of Jesus and its consequences for each of us, making the parallel with the firstfruits:

*But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).*

The evidence for the resurrection is overwhelming! Hallelujah! More than that, the resurrection of the Messiah is the firstborn, the firstfruits of the resurrection of mankind. His resurrection began the process of defeating God's enemies, including death itself. His resurrection guarantees the resurrection of the dead (both believers and non-believers!) to stand before God's throne at the end of time, where He will judge the living and the dead. At the end of the process, even death itself will no longer exist. The resurrection reminds us that our lives are spiritual and that there is more to life than our mortal bodies here on earth. Since Jesus is the first to rise from the dead, firstfruits is a reminder of eternity.

*He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent (Colossians 1:18).*

Jesus had raised other people from the dead, like Lazarus, all of whom later died a natural death. In contrast, Jesus Himself rose with a glorified, immortal body, like the bodies of righteous saints who would be raised at the end time to inherit the Kingdom and never to die again (Daniel 12:2). The resurrection of Jesus was the seal of His accepted sacrifice, the proof that He had indeed overcome sin and death and could

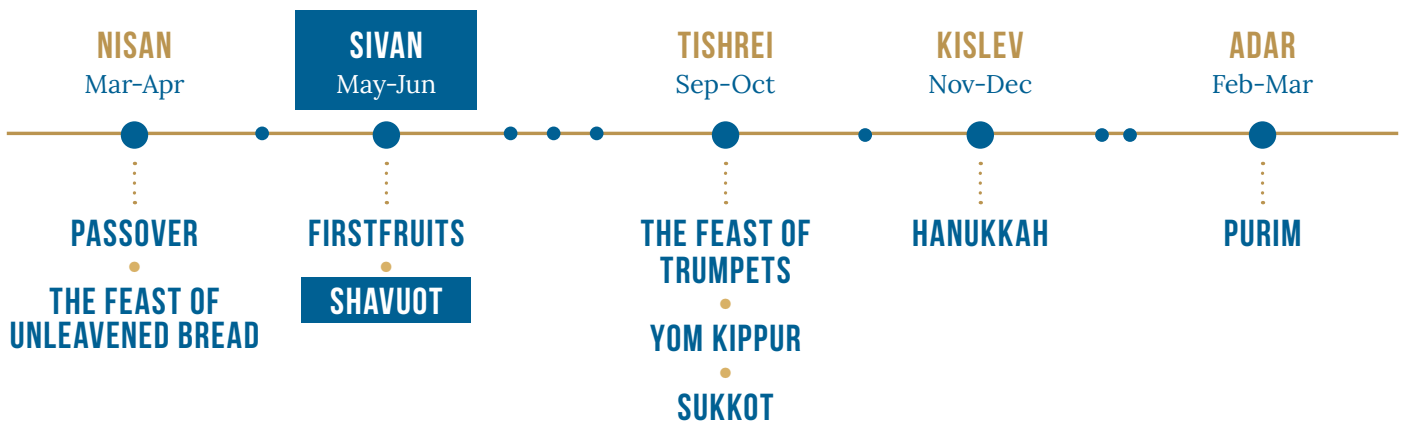
offer forgiveness and resurrection life to all who believe in Him (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Although we will all one day rise from the dead, Jesus is risen in a way that no one has risen before. Jesus is alive, sitting at the right hand of the Father in the true tabernacle in heaven with all authority and power. He sustains the world, prepares a place for believers, interceding for us who believe. One day we will join Him! We will have a new and immortal body and live with Him forever where there is no more death, crying, or pain.

Today, we celebrate the firstfruits of God both physically and spiritually. We are reminded that we have been redeemed by the Passover Lamb, but also we see in Messiah Jesus the firstfruits of eternal life for both Jew and Gentile because of His death, resurrection, and ascension. The Messiah's death was not the end of the story, for on the third day after the Passover, which was the day of the waving of the firstfruits in the temple, Jesus rose again!





# SHAVUOT



Read more about Shavuot and the biblical feasts.



*“You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD” (Leviticus 23:15-16).*

Shavuot literally means “weeks” but is commonly called Pentecost, from the Greek word meaning “fifty,” as it occurs 50 days counted from the day of firstfruits after Passover. After that initial “omer” is waved at firstfruits, the “counting of the omer” begins for 50 days, which is seven weeks—seven Sabbaths. This counting period of seven weeks (a week of weeks, seven sevens) marks the period from the harvesting of barley to the harvesting of wheat, which is the last cereal to ripen. Since it is a celebration of God’s goodness in the summer harvest, it is also known as the Feast of the Harvest, or as we call it in Hebrew, Hag Hakatzir (Exodus 34:22). It is one of the three holidays in the Jewish calendar when all of Israel would go up to the Temple in Jerusalem to celebrate together:

*“Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed. ... Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the LORD GOD” (Exodus 23:14-15, 17).*

It is traditional at this time to read through the book of Ruth, in part because Ruth’s story is set in the time of the barley harvest. Tradition holds that King David was born and died at this time, and he was, of course, the great-grandson of Ruth and Boaz, who are the main protagonists in the story. Additionally, Boaz met Ruth as she was collecting the gleanings of the harvest that the reapers left behind, just as God commanded them to do when He gave His instructions about the Feast of the Harvest in the chapter that we’re focusing on here in Leviticus 23:

*“And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God” (v. 22).*

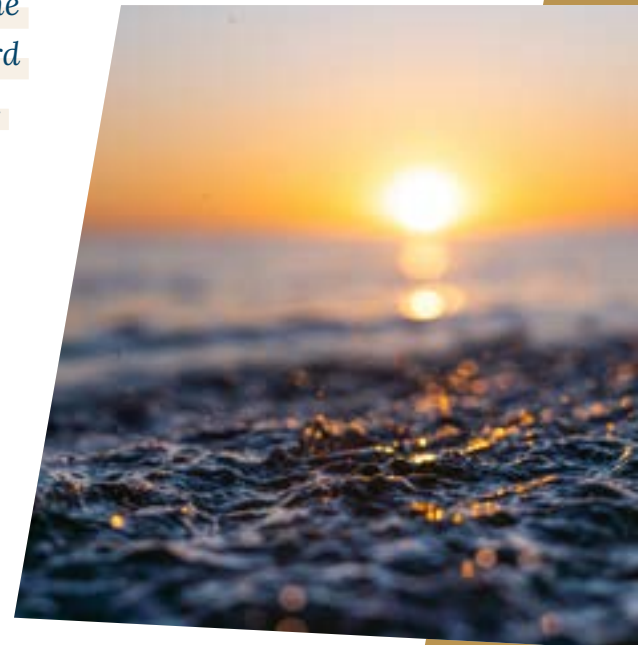
Just as Jewish Boaz and Gentile Ruth were united in marriage at the time of the harvest, at Pentecost we see God's heart to join Jewish and Gentile believers to become "one new man" in Jesus. At Shavuot we are told to wave two loaves of bread before the Lord, like the fellowship of Jew and Gentile together in the house of God.

It was at this time in the biblical calendar that the two expressions of God's people were formed and sent out: The forming of Israel as a faith community at Mount Sinai, and the birth of the church when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples on Mount Zion.

It was at Shavuot that the people of Israel became a faith community, responding to God's law and agreeing to follow Him as His people. And just as the Torah was given to Israel at Shavuot, the Holy Spirit was given to the early Church on Mount Zion. In a similarly definitive event, the Church was launched into action as the Spirit fell at Pentecost.

This feast marks the time when Gentiles were included into the covenant with Israel, and grafted in. God's Spirit was to be poured out on all peoples. Here's a reminder of what happened at that Feast of Shavuot right after the resurrection of Jesus. For 40 days after He rose from the dead, Jesus appeared to the disciples and taught them about the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). He also left them some instructions about what would soon happen:

*"And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. ... But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth'" (Acts 1:4-5, 8).*



The disciples then waited in Jerusalem, in the upper room where they used to gather, and persevered in prayer. Ten days after the Lord ascended to heaven before their eyes, (that's 40 days since firstfruits—plus another 10, taking us to 50, Pentecost) on the day of Shavuot, they were all together in Jerusalem. Not only had the disciples been told by Jesus to wait in Jerusalem, but also it was Shavuot, which required the presence of all men at the Temple. We must remember that in each of the three pilgrimage holidays, the city of Jerusalem would be full to the brim. Jewish and God-fearing men came from all corners of the known world to seek God at the Temple in Jerusalem, just as He commanded in Deuteronomy 16. A defining event was about to take place. The Holy Spirit filled each one of the disciples in the upper room. What exactly happened? It's recorded for us in Acts chapter 2:

*“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.’ And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ But others mocking said, ‘They are filled with new wine’” (Acts 2:1-13).*

There were some 120 disciples, including women, gathered in the upper room according to Acts 1:15. The falling of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples was accompanied by a voice from heaven, like the sound of a strong wind. In a parallel event at Mount Sinai at this same time of year, immediately after the exodus from

Egypt, we read in Exodus 19 that God came and visited His people, descending on Mount Sinai in a manner they could see and hear as well:

*"... [A]nd be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. ... On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled (Exodus 19:11, 16).*

In Acts, the Holy Spirit filled the disciples and gave them words of praise to God in many other languages. People had come to Jerusalem from many different nations in the region, and now the Holy Spirit gave the ability to speak the languages of all of these people. Luke details exactly which nations were present, where they came from, and what languages were heard from the mouths of the disciples. All those present were stunned! They realized that something very unusual, something supernatural, had occurred. Peter stood up to speak and explain the nature and purpose of what they were witnessing. The whole event would have astonished the disciples—even more so all those who were not yet saved! The disciples knew that something was going to happen, after all, they were waiting for it according to the words of the Lord. The unsaved saw and understood that they were missing something important, and that the disciples had something they did not have. There was a clear difference between those who believed in Jesus and those who did not, who included those knowledgeable in the Torah—rabbis and Torah teachers. But how were they to understand the new spiritual reality unfolding before them?

Peter, now full of the Holy Spirit, stood and explained to all those present that they were witnessing the fulfillment of a prophecy spoken by the prophet Joel, and quotes the prophets Joel (3:1-5, 1:1-3), Zechariah (9:9-10), and Moses (Genesis 39:8-12). He had a captive audience—they could not ignore what they saw with their eyes and heard with their ears. Now Peter explains that Jesus, who had been among them, was none other than the promised Messiah of the people of Israel.

*"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst,*



*as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it” (Acts 2:22-24).*

It is important to note that those present could know for certain that the tomb of Jesus was empty. Peter proves the resurrection of the Lord through Messianic prophecies concerning the resurrection of Jesus from the dead by quoting Psalm 16 and reminds his listeners that now the Lord Jesus sits at the right hand of God the Father, just as it is promised in Psalm 110, and by virtue of His right, pours out His Holy Spirit on those who belong to Him. All those present who were familiar with the Scriptures, and who had seen the miracles, understood that Peter was teaching the truth!

Some of them could understand in a moment that the event before their eyes was similar to the act of receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai. They could understand very well that they had sinned against God by rejecting the purpose of the Torah, the Messiah of Israel, and now all that was left for them was to wait for the most terrible judgment. Peter made their guilt clear!

*“Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the LORD our God calls to himself.’ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this crooked generation.’ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:37-41).*

At Sinai, 3,000 men were killed for breaking the law by worshiping the golden calf. On Mount Zion, 3,000 were saved. We broke God’s laws as soon as we got them, but God sent Jesus as our Messiah to save and forgive. This good news was not just for Israel, but all nations, both Jew and Gentile.

## THE CUSTOMS OF SHAVUOT

Shavuot has another name developed by tradition: the “Festival of the Giving of the Law,” or in Hebrew, Hag Matan Torah. Shavuot received this name due to a tradition that the five books of Moses (the Torah) were given to Israel during this particular season. In Jewish tradition, those who wish to celebrate the giving of the Torah stay up all night reading it! It is thought to help bring redemption and healing to the world, or “tikkun.” The giving of the Torah at Sinai was a definitive event for the Jewish people, as they were now as a nation called to be different and follow God’s unique laws for them. Back to Leviticus 23 and God’s instructions for celebrating the Feast of Weeks, there are many sacrifices involved:

*“And you shall present with the bread seven lambs a year old without blemish, and one bull from the herd and two rams. They shall be a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. And you shall offer one male goat for a sin offering, and two male lambs a year old as a sacrifice of peace offerings. And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the LORD for the priest” (Leviticus 23:18-20).*

So as you can clearly see, this feast involved a lot of meat as well as grains from the harvest. Nevertheless, today the Feast of Shavuot is known as a “dairy holiday” when everyone eats a lot of dairy products, and the highlight of the holiday is none other than cheesecake! In Jewish tradition, keeping kosher (separating meat and dairy) is representative of keeping the Law, or Torah. This comes from God’s instructions not to boil a kid in its mother’s milk, and has been interpreted to mean to not mix meat and dairy. Since Shavuot has become a celebration of the Law, this aspect of keeping kosher has become somewhat front and central, and serves as a good example of how far tradition can deviate from the original biblical commandment.

God commands that bread is waved with the firstfruits, and the idea of the firstfruits—the fruit of the land—also appears in the way we celebrate today. The seven species of wheat, barley, figs, date honey, pomegranates, grapes, and olives promised to Israel in Deuteronomy 8:8 often feature in the celebrations. Sometimes in agricultural communities a procession of tractors and carts filled with the different products grown are driven throughout the town. On Golan’s kibbutz the highlight of the ceremony was the last cart—with mothers carrying all newborn babies born over the

last year! In Israel today, you can see children dressed up in white with wreaths of flowers on their heads, gathering for a celebration. It is customary to decorate with greens and fresh flowers to represent the spring harvest and the ancient ritual of bringing the first fruits to the temple.

## THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS

As we come to the midpoint of the biblical year, we are greeted by the piercing sound of a trumpet. This feast, or appointed time, is called the Feast of Trumpets, or more literally, the Feast of Loud Noises! In Hebrew it is called “Yom Teruah,” but today it is better known as “Rosh Hashanah,” which means “Head of the Year.” Here we will consider the significance of this feast and how the people of Israel were commanded to observe it. We will also look at how it is celebrated today in Israel, and how it relates to the New Testament.

From the text in Leviticus 23 and its parallel passage in Numbers 29, we learn that this special day included three key elements: a Sabbath rest, the offering of special sacrifices, and a memorial proclaimed with the blast of trumpets.

*“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the people of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of solemn rest, a memorial proclaimed with blast of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work, and you shall present a food offering to the LORD’ (Leviticus 23:23-25).”*

## REST

On the first day of the seventh month in the biblical calendar, which typically would occur sometime during September, the people of Israel had to cease from their work completely, just as they would on the weekly Sabbath. The purpose of this Sabbath rest was to remove distractions of work and busyness to allow the people to fulfill the required ceremonies of this day and to reflect on its meaning.

## SACRIFICES

As with other appointed times, this feast also involved sacrifices. In addition to the daily sacrifices and the special sacrifices for the new month, the people of Israel had to bring an additional offering specific for this day. The details of this special offering are found in Numbers 29:1-6.

## TRUMPETS

Most importantly, the very heart of this day was the special command that it should be a memorial proclaimed by the blast of trumpets, or shofars. Two types of trumpets are described in Scripture: silver trumpets, which were to be used only by the priests on specific occasions; and shofars, which could apparently be used by anyone in the community without any special restrictions. The shofar was a fairly small trumpet that was made of a ram's horn. The dry horn would be cleaned out and a hole would be made in its narrow end, through which air could be blown into the horn, resulting in a strong alarm-like sound. The shofar was to be used every year on this day, as well as on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), and especially on every Sabbatical year and on the Year of Jubilee.

Trumpets were used in ancient Israel for different reasons, such as for calling the people to an assembly, or to announce when the camp was setting out on a journey (Numbers 10:1-10, Jeremiah 4:19, Joshua 6:20). But this time the sound of the shofar was not about assembling or moving camp. This time the trumpet was a call to remember. The Hebrew word that is translated as “memorial” or “remembrance” in this verse is *zikaron*. The meaning of this word is somewhat ambiguous and can mean either “a day of remembering” or “a day of reminding.” This begs the question, who needs to be reminded, and of what? This is the only place in Scripture where this phrase is used, and the text here doesn’t give us a clear answer to these questions. But we find a possible clue to its meaning in the book of Numbers. The only other place in Scripture where these two concepts of the trumpet and the word *zikaron* appear together, is in Numbers 10:9-10:

*“And when you go to war in your land against the adversary who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, that you may be remembered before the LORD your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies. On the day of your gladness also, and at your appointed feasts and at the beginnings of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings. They shall be a reminder of you before your God: I am the LORD your God.”*



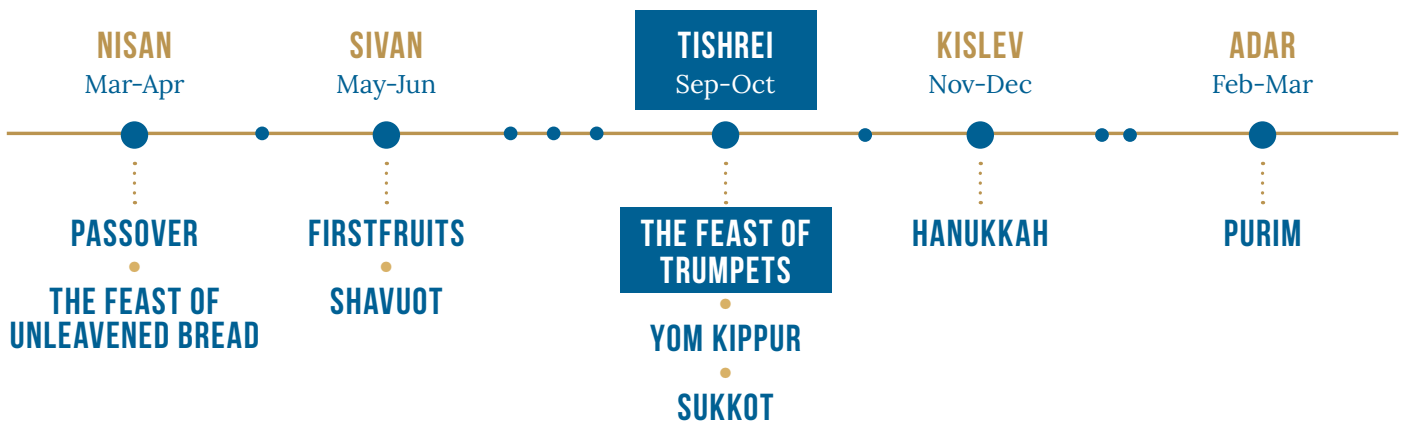
Although this text is speaking of silver trumpets and not of shofars, we nevertheless see that the act of blowing trumpets is directly linked here with the concept of *zikaron*. As the blast of trumpets would sound in a time of war, the Lord would remember His people and come to their rescue, and when it would sound during the offering of sacrifices, the Lord would remember His people and forgive their sins. It would seem then that at certain times the blast of the shofar could express a cry for God to remember His people in a time of need, which could be the meaning of *zikaron* in this case, too. However, it may also be argued that the shofar blast on this day was not intended as a *zikaron* for God, but for Israel. It may have been intended as a call for Israel to remember their covenant with God, and to remember how they first heard the sound of the trumpet when God came down to meet them on Mt. Sinai:

*“On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. ... And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder” (Exodus 19:16-17, 19).*

The sound of the shofar then is perhaps meant to be an echo of Sinai: a strong reminder of God’s gracious and awesome invitation to Israel to be His special people. Perhaps it’s both: a cry for God to remember His people, and at the same time it’s an awakening and a stirring of His people to remember and return to Him, especially in preparation for the coming Day of Atonement.



# THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS



Read more about trumpets today and the biblical feasts.



## THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS TODAY

Having considered the biblical commands and practices regarding the feast, let us now look at the way in which the Feast of Trumpets is observed today by the Jewish people. Has anything changed? Actually, many Jewish people today won't be so familiar with the terms "Yom Teruah" or "the Day of the Blowing Trumpets" because this feast is simply known as Rosh Hashanah, which means "Head of the Year." This is the day on which the Jewish new year is celebrated. According to Exodus 12:12, the year begins on the first day of Nisan in the springtime, but ancient Jewish tradition has determined that there are two cycles in the year, and thus two beginnings: the start of the biblical calendar in Nisan and the start of the civil or agricultural year in Tishrei, the seventh month, as is indicated by Exodus 23:16 and 34:22.

## ROSH HASHANAH TRADITIONS

It is customary for Jewish people to dress in new (and often white) clothes and hold a festive meal with family and friends, with several symbolic foods that have to do with new beginnings. For example it is typical to be served apples and honey (for a sweet year), round challah bread (for the new yearly cycle), fish heads (to be the head and not the tail this coming year), and pomegranates (that our blessings would be as many as the seeds of the pomegranate). While the celebration of the new year has become the central theme of this feast, several other significant meanings are attached to Yom Teruah according to Jewish tradition: It is believed to be the day when God completed His creation and all created beings crowned Him as their king. This is expressed in special prayers that have to do with God's kingship, which are recited only on this day.

In rabbinic tradition Rosh Hashana is also considered to be a day of judgment, when God determines the fate of each man according to his deeds in the past year, and then seals that fate in the Book of Life ten days later on the Day of Atonement. It is believed that some people are deemed wicked right away and are immediately sentenced for death, others are deemed righteous and are rewarded with life, but all the rest are somewhere in between and still have a chance to correct their ways and change their fate before the Day of Atonement. Hence the traditional Jewish greeting during these ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (otherwise known as the Days of Awe): "May you be inscribed for a good year!" Or, "May you be inscribed for life!" Because it is such an important day when each man's fate is decided, many Jewish people spend most of the day in the synagogue reciting special prayers and asking forgiveness of people they might have offended in the hope of a better judgment. Related to this is a symbolic ceremony known as the custom of *tashlich*. The word *tashlich* can be translated as the verb "to cast away" and it comes from Micah 7:19b,

which says: “You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” This ceremony takes place outdoors, when Jewish men, women, and children go to a nearby body of water and symbolically empty their pockets, throwing what is left into the water. This symbolizes the casting away of sins into the depth of the sea where they are remembered no more.

More biblically, following what is commanded in Leviticus, in Israel today this feast is still observed as a national day of rest. Most shops are closed and public transport stops running. Many people spend part of the day praying in the synagogue, and the rest of the time with friends and family. Following the biblical commandment to blow the shofar, it is also customary for many people to attend synagogue at least once to hear the sound of the shofar on this day. While Scripture leaves the instructions about the trumpet blowing somewhat vague, traditional Judaism has determined that every Jewish person must hear the sound of the shofar at least once during this time and has articulated three specific types of trumpet blowing: *tekiah* (a single long blast), *shevarim* (three short blasts, which resemble the sound of a cry or a wail to indicate repentance), and *teruah* (a series of at least nine very short blasts). Some Jewish traditions add another extremely long blast at the end called *tekiah gdola*.

## THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament clearly shows that other feasts have found their fulfillment in Messiah, such as His lordship over the Sabbath, His death on Passover, His resurrection on the Feast of Firstfruits, and the pouring of the Holy Spirit on the Feast of Weeks, and many also see the Day of Trumpets as foreshadowing a future event. Although this particular feast isn't explicitly mentioned in the New Testament, the main symbol of the feast—the trumpet or shofar—is found in several key places and is consistently linked with the end of days and the return of the Messiah.

*“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. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).*

Be it the rapture when He returns for the Church, His gathering of the children of Israel from the four corners of the earth, or His final return to earth when the dead shall rise again, all of these events are said to be accompanied by the sound of the

shofar or the trumpet. It is important to note that this idea is carried through from the teachings of the Hebrew Bible, such as in Joel 2:1, “Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near.” And in Zechariah 9:14, “Then the LORD will appear over them, and his arrow will go forth like lightning; the LORD GOD will sound the trumpet and will march forth in the whirlwinds of the south.” So although we are not able to say with certainty how things will pan out in the future, it is reasonable to say that Yom Teruah, or the Feast of Blowing Trumpets, may be a foreshadowing of the return of the Messiah.

Yom Teruah is God’s appointed alarm clock for Israel. It is a time of awakening, of remembering, and of preparing for the coming Day of Atonement ten days ahead. But it is also a day of great joy and expectation for the wonderful time of Jesus’s return. It’s a time to remember our own covenant with God, our journey and relationship with Him, and to watch and pray for His return. Are we ready?

The people have the duty to read the Torah and for ten days to do soul-searching before the approaching Yom Kippur (see also Deuteronomy 29, Deuteronomy 16, and Deuteronomy 10). In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah there was an important and significant spiritual awakening in our nation when the people gathered to hear the reading of God’s word from the mouth of Ezra the scribe. Apparently, it was during this period that the custom began to celebrate “Rosh Hashanah” precisely on the Feast of Rejoicing. Just as the spiritual awakening in those days formed the basis for the first coming of Jesus, and the fulfillment of the Feast of Remembrance will form the basis for the second coming of Jesus.

*“And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel. So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. ... They read from*



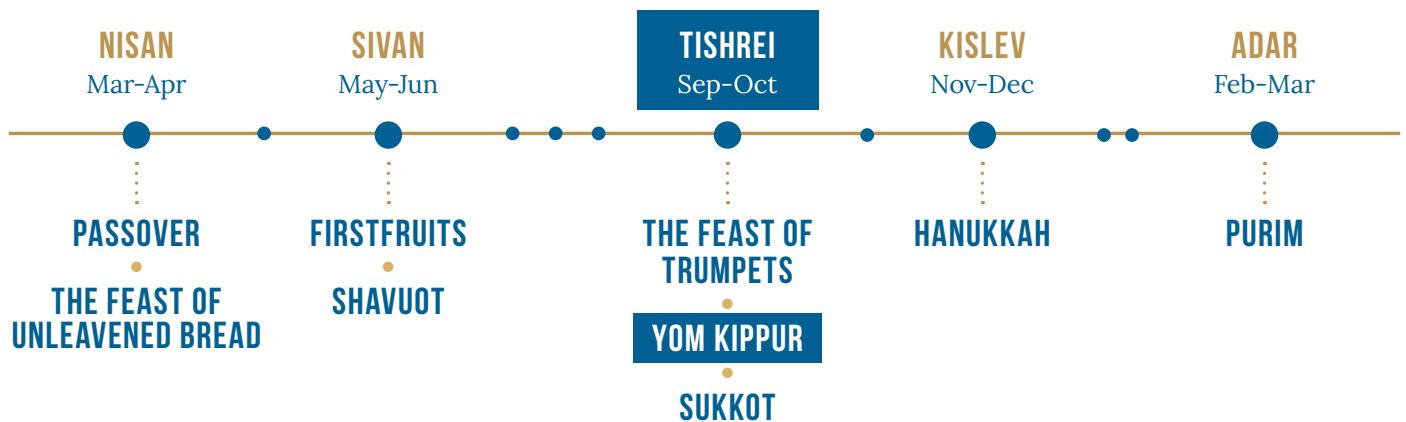
*the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading” (Nehemiah 8:1-3, 8).*

The ten days between the Feast of Trumpets (often thought to represent the rapture) and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, are known as the “Ten Days of Awe.” Many believe that the fall feasts correlate with events in the second coming, just as the spring feasts lined up so perfectly with the crucifixion, resurrection, and sending of the Holy Spirit. The Bible speaks of a time in the latter days of great tribulation, Jacob’s trouble, which will last for seven years. The antichrist will make a covenant of peace with Israel but then break it after three and a half years. This will bring a period of persecution for Jewish people and believers on the earth more terrible than anything that has ever been seen before Jesus comes back to rescue His people. We have seen how the first four feasts have fulfilled many aspects of God’s plan of salvation, and we can also expect that the latter three feasts will also be fulfilled in a similar way. Just as the Ten Days of Awe are times of serious reflection, repentance, and preparation, so this is a great reminder for us to pray for our families, our friends, our neighbors, and our people. Today is the day of salvation! Our Messiah is faithful to fulfill His word. This high holy day serves as a reminder to get right with God and others, and to encourage those around us to receive the forgiveness only Jesus can give.





# YOM KIPPUR



Read more about Yom Kippur and the biblical feasts.



*“Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves and present a food offering to the LORD. And you shall not do any work on that very day, for it is a Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God” (Leviticus 23:27-28).*

The holiest day of the year in the Jewish calendar is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. It is the second of the three fall festivals, and it takes place ten days after the Feast of Trumpets. Those ten days give us time to reflect on the past year as well as an opportunity to examine our relationship with God, while the Day of Atonement itself was ordained by God as the time to set things right. One of the main lessons of Yom Kippur is that God takes sin seriously. But what exactly is sin? In our modern world, this is not a popular concept. On one hand, everyone agrees that we all fall short. Sayings such as “nobody’s perfect” or “I’m only human” are common, but the biblical definition cuts much deeper. There are several Hebrew words used in the Old Testament for sin. The meanings range from “missing the mark” to “rebellion” to “wickedness.” Sin comprises both individual mistakes and an ongoing condition of the heart. But the ultimate consequence is always separation from God:

*“... [Y]our iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear” (Isaiah 59:2).*

The entire sacrificial system was designed to reveal the human problem of sin and provide the ultimate solution. The concept of substitution was always key. The origin of this may go back as far as the Garden of Eden when God made clothes of animal skins for Adam and Eve. Presumably, these animals died in the process. Sacrifices provided a covering, a cleansing, and a restored relationship with God, enabling us to walk in fellowship with Him as Adam and Eve did in Eden. While atonement was not the sole purpose of the later sacrificial system, it was definitely the major part. And the most important sacrifices of the whole year happened on the Day of Atonement.

## YOM KIPPUR IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Yom Kippur is mentioned in Leviticus 23, along with the other six annual feasts, but the whole of chapter 16 is dedicated to explaining it in more detail. First, the high priest, Aaron, was to enter the Most Holy Place, also called the Holy of Holies.

This never happened at any other time of the year. The sacrifices on that day began with a bull, as a sin offering to provide atonement for the high priest and his family. The sin offering was one of the five types of offerings mentioned in the first five chapters of Leviticus. Like its name implies, it was for the expiation of sin. Then, two goats were brought into the Tent of Meeting. Lots were cast and each goat would have a unique function: One was sacrificed as a sin offering, but the other one was special. In English, we call it the “scapegoat.” This is where the expression comes from. A scapegoat in modern language is simply one who is innocent, but who is taking the blame, the burden, and the penalty for those who are guilty. This second goat represented the children of Israel. The high priest took the blood of the bull and sprinkled it on the mercy seat with his fingers seven times (the mercy seat was the solid gold covering of the Ark of the Covenant). The high priest then repeated the process with the blood of the first goat. This ensured that the holy place was now clean. After this, it was time for the second goat, the scapegoat.

*“And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness” (Leviticus 16:21).*

The scapegoat reminds us that God has provided a substitute. When the high priest placed his hands on the goat’s head, in a very real way he was transferring the sins of the people onto the substitute. There are two important matters to note here: First, this special day of atoning for sins was designed to atone for the sins of Israel as a community—not in a personal, individual way. Secondly, just as Passover speaks of the second coming as well as the first (the great redemption at the end of time as well as the sacrifice of the Passover lamb), so Yom Kippur speaks of the atoning sacrifice of our innocent Messiah in His first coming, as well as judgment at His second. The feasts have several layers of fulfillment and reflect both aspects of our Messiah as the Lion and the Lamb.

## YOM KIPPUR IN JUDAISM TODAY

Since the destruction of the second temple in the year A.D. 70, there have been no sacrifices offered. Judaism was forever changed, and transformed into what is usually called “Rabbinic Judaism.”



The role of the temple was replaced. According to the rabbis, atonement may now be gained by a variety of means: prayer and fasting, giving to charity, and even one's own death. Yet Yom Kippur remains the holiest day of the year for the Jewish community. In fact, it is often one of the few days of the year when non-religious Jews go to the synagogue, in the same way that many Gentiles go to church only at Christmas and Easter. At the same time, there is also a recognition in traditional Judaism that something is missing. The sacrificial system represents well over half the laws in the Law of Moses. Sacrifices were called “a pleasing aroma” to God and were made every morning, noon, and night. Today, Orthodox Jews pray three times a day instead of the morning, noon, and evening sacrifices, and include prayers for the rebuilding of the temple. There is also an interesting custom called kapparot, in which a chicken is tied to a string, slaughtered, and swung around as the worshippers declare that it is a substitute for their sins. This tradition continues among ultra-Orthodox Jews today. It is not uncommon for people to come to faith on this day, when the penny drops: indeed, prayer and fasting is not enough to take away our sin—there must be an atoning sacrifice.

## YOM KIPPUR IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Day of Atonement, of course, wonderfully foreshadows the New Testament. Both goats draw our attention to Jesus. The first goat was sacrificed for our sin. The second goat, the scapegoat, reminds us that when we follow God's plan, our sins are taken far away from us—just like the goat that was released into the wilderness—and we no longer need to fear punishment for our sin.

Yom Kippur is alluded to several times in the New Testament. In Romans 3:25, Paul writes that God gave the Messiah, Jesus, as a “propitiation” by the shedding of His blood. The word usually translated as “propitiation” refers to the mercy seat of the tabernacle and later the temple. The most direct reference comes from the book of Hebrews. Chapter 9 clearly speaks about the sacrifices of Yom Kippur in relation to Jesus:

*“For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Hebrews 9:13-14).*

Yom Kippur was the divinely appointed means for providing forgiveness of Israel's sins. As long as the tabernacle (and later the temple) was standing, there was an opportunity to receive God's mercy and forgiveness. Jesus came in fulfillment of the role of the temple itself. In Isaiah 53:10, He Himself is described as a "guilt offering", a term directly referring to the sacrificial system, and in John 2:19, He says, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

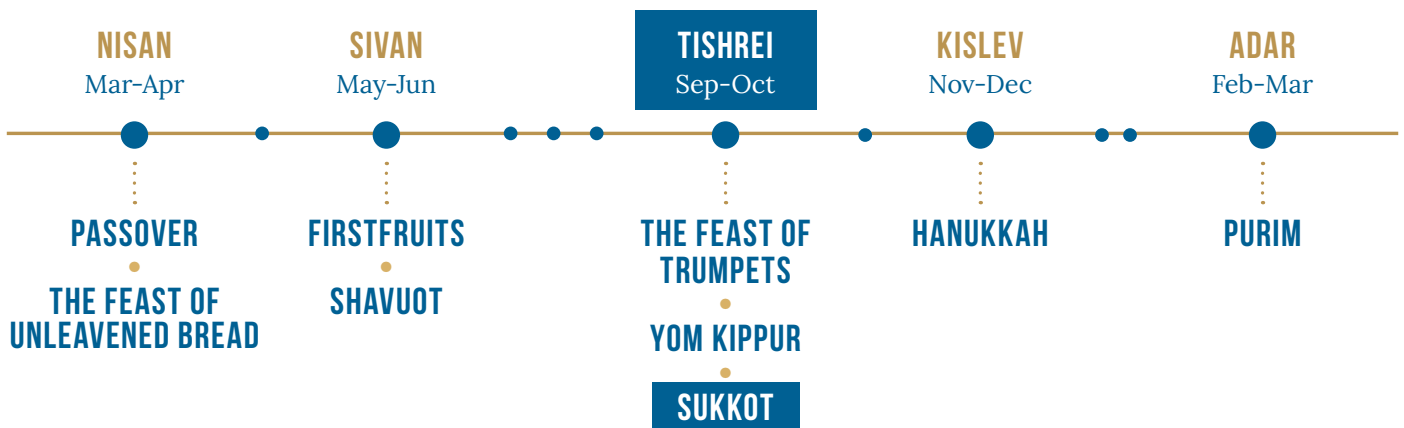
There is more to come in regards to the fulfillment of Yom Kippur. Just as the original commandment in Leviticus 23 described how the whole house of Israel would receive forgiveness for sin as a nation, so we see repentance and salvation will come to Israel as a whole at the end of time. Yom Kippur is about national, not personal, atonement, and one day all Israel will be saved!

*"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" (Zechariah 12:10).*

*"Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:25-26a).*



# SUKKOT



Read more about Sukkot  
and the biblical feasts.



Sukkot, or as it is known in English, the Feast of Booths or Feast of Tabernacles, is the last of the seven feasts listed in Leviticus 23. It was also the third and last of the pilgrimage festivals—the three times during the year in which the people of Israel had to “go up” from wherever they might be living to present themselves before the Lord in Jerusalem. This festival is incredibly important and bursting with significance. Let’s read what is said about Sukkot in Leviticus 23 and then think about its various aspects.

*“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the people of Israel, saying, On the fifteenth day of this seventh month and for seven days is the Feast of Booths to the LORD. On the first day shall be a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. For seven days you shall present food offerings to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall hold a holy convocation and present a food offering to the LORD. It is a solemn assembly; you shall not do any ordinary work.’”*

*“These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim as times of holy convocation, for presenting to the LORD food offerings, burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each on its proper day, besides the LORD’s Sabbaths and besides your gifts and besides all your vow offerings and besides all your freewill offerings, which you give to the LORD.”*

*“On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD seven days. On the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest. And you shall take on the first day the fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. You shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It is a statute forever throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 23:33-42).*

You can already see from this reading that the Feast of Sukkot has points of significance that are represented visually by the things that the children of Israel were told to do. Let's look at those three main things, each of which was a very visual act, and think a little about what they signified.

## SACRIFICES

First, the Israelites were to present an offering by fire. This is true also at the other festivals, but the special thing about Sukkot is the huge number of burnt offerings. We are given the details in the parallel passage in Numbers 29:12-38. On the first day they were to sacrifice 13 bulls, 2 rams, and 14 male, year-old lambs. All this was along with the appointed grain offerings and drink offerings, and also a male goat for a sin offering for each day of the feast. Interestingly, the bulls offered were to be reduced in number from 13 on the first day to 7 on the seventh day, then on the holy convocation on the eighth day, just 1 was offered. What was the significance of these offerings? We are told in Leviticus 1 that the burnt offering could be connected with atonement from sin. But in Numbers 29:13 we are told that in this case it was to be a "sweet smell to the Lord." Since there was also to be on each day of the festival a "sin offering," the large number of burnt offerings that were offered were, it seems, more a way of offering dedication and thanksgiving to God than atonement for sin. Something important to point out regarding these sacrifices is the repetition of the number 7: Sukkot was held in the seventh month, sacrificing 7 bulls on the seventh day, and in total 70 bulls were sacrificed during the feast. This signifies completion.

## FOUR SPECIES OF PLANTS

The second visual symbol to consider is that the Israelites had to take for themselves the foliage of four kinds of plants in order to celebrate Sukkot. This was very visual and also personal, being something that everyone was to do. Today, this collection of foliage is called the '*lulav*': a tight bunch of the four types of plant centered around the palm leaf, and it is the continuation of God's command. Importantly, we are specifically told in connection with this command to "Rejoice before the LORD." The Feast of Sukkot is a time of rejoicing. The fact that the feast is at the time of harvest and is also called the Feast of Ingathering in Exodus 23:16 and 34:22 links the



command to take the four species of plant with the Israelites arriving in the land of Israel. So the joy that accompanies Sukkot is clearly connected with the blessings of being in the land of Israel. This leads to the third visual act that the children of Israel were told to do.

## **TABERNACLES**

The third symbol was the commandment to build “sukkot”, or shelters, and to live in them for the duration of the festival. This is why it is called the Feast of Booths or Feast of Tabernacles in English. The sukkah (“sukkah” being singular, and “sukkot” being plural) is a makeshift dwelling made out of movable materials. Later on, in Jewish tradition, very specific instructions as to the building of the sukkah were added. In Israel today they vary, but most have palm branches or reeds as the roof covering, so you can see through to the stars. If you were to come to Israel, you would see all kinds of sukkot of various sizes on the balconies of the apartment buildings during the Feast of Sukkot. Most of them are structures with walls of cloth, and families may sit in them to eat their meals and enjoy time together. Today most people don’t sleep in them, although some do. Building a sukkah is a visual and experiential act and is full of meaning—that future generations may know about the way that the Lord led the children of Israel through the desert when He brought them out of Egypt. In other words, the sukkot are to teach us and our children about the way that the Lord led us, provided for us, and protected us when we were on the way to the Promised Land. We know from Deuteronomy 8 that remembering the way God brought us to Israel reminds us that everything we have today comes from Him, and this feast helps keep us from thinking that we have got where we are by our own strength or skill.

From these visual acts and the meaning associated with them we see that the festival of Sukkot has, in fact, three layers of significance: past, present, and future.

**Past:** Living in the sukkot for a week reminds of the fact that God brought us all the way to the Promised Land, and speaks of God’s faithfulness to us in the past.

**Present:** Rejoicing with the four plants, representing the blessings of the land into which God has brought us, speaks of the blessings of our present reality living here in Israel once again.

**Future:** The number seven that features strongly in this feast represents completion, the last and final day of the week—the Sabbath. So the Feast of Sukkot, also being the last of the seven biblical feasts in the seventh month, has a significance that points forward to the Last Days. Significantly, Zechariah prophesies that in the future,

all nations will be required to come and join in the celebration of Sukkot, rejoicing in the Lord's presence and blessing:

*"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. And if any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them. And if the family of Egypt does not go up and present themselves, then on them there shall be no rain; there shall be the plague with which the LORD afflicts the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Booths. This shall be the punishment to Egypt and the punishment to all the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Booths. And on that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, 'Holy to the LORD.' And the pots in the house of the LORD shall be as the bowls before the altar. And every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holy to the LORD of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and take of them and boil the meat of the sacrifice in them. And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day" (Zechariah 14:16-21).*

## THE EIGHTH DAY

The real fulfillment of this festival will only come at the end, when God and man dwell together, and we will finally be with God and be able to see Him face to face. What is interesting about this feast is that it is a feast to be kept for seven days, but then it also mentions "the eighth day"—not once, but twice:

*"For seven days you shall present food offerings to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall hold a holy convocation and present a food offering to the LORD. It is a solemn assembly; you shall not do any ordinary work" (Leviticus 23:36).*



*“On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD seven days. On the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest” (Leviticus 23:29).*

Just as the number seven and seventh crop up multiple times in the instructions regarding Sukkot, the number eight also has significance. We see this as we look at the eighth day of the assembly: Shemini Atzeret. Just as seven represents completion, so eight represents new beginnings, and eternity. Today in Israel, Shemini Atzeret is also known as Simchat Torah (celebrated on the following day out in the diaspora) in which there is great dancing, jubilation, and rejoicing in the street with Torah scrolls. The yearly cycle of reading through the Torah now begins again at the end of Sukkot in accordance with the Babylonian “beginning.” There is also a biblical reason to associate the giving, reading, and obeying of God’s Word with this time of year. Deuteronomy 31:10–13 says that every seven years, in the year of Shmita (the Sabbath rest for the land), during the festival of Sukkot, the Torah should be read in the presence of all the people, young and old alike (the first five books of the Bible, “Torah” means “teaching” or “law”). So the festival is connected with God’s Word and the importance of hearing it and doing it.

Simchat Torah seems to be a relative latecomer to the party, but back in the time of Jesus, much of the joy of this season related to water: living water. Water is a big deal in dry, dusty Israel. Water has the power of life and death. This seventh month in which all the fall festivals are celebrated is also known as the month of “Ethanim” (1 Kings 8:2). “Ethanim” means steadily flowing waters, constant rivers that do not run dry. This biblical theme of steadily flowing streams is also an important aspect of Sukkot. In Leviticus 23:40 we are told to take, amongst the other plants, “willows of the brook,” so called because the willow is usually found beside water. The mention of the plants and water connect with two linked motifs found throughout Scripture: fruitful trees and water—in particular the water of a river. Both of these are found together, of course, in the garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8–14). As Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well, He has the ability to give living water that flows and flows forever:

*“Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, “Give me a drink,” you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water” (John 4:10).*

The living water Jesus is offering represents life not only here in this temporary world, but also in the world to come—in eternity. This takes us back to the reason for Shemini Atzeret, the Eighth Day of the Assembly. Seven is the number of completion, but eight pertains to eternity, and the world to come. It was on the eighth day, the last and greatest day of the feast, that Jesus announced that He Himself was the water of life. He used the theme of water during the water libation ritual that had become customary at the Feast of Sukkot to give a very vivid illustration:

*“On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”’ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:37-39).*

According to the practice in the Temple in those days, on each day of the Feast of Sukkot, water was drawn from the Pool of Siloam and brought to the Temple where it was poured out. Great joy was associated with this water libation ritual. In connection with this tradition, Jesus stood up in the Temple on the last, the great day of the feast and made this amazing statement about Himself and the way that the Spirit will flow out of the heart of all who “drink” from Jesus. Thinking about it in the context of Sukkot, we can also see that Jesus was using the theme of the ways in which God supplied the people’s needs in the desert, and then brought them into a land flowing with streams and bursting with fruitful plants. All of this comes in a real way to those who believe in Him. Here is also the return to the Garden of Eden from which flowed out rivers of water! The believer in Jesus will become like Eden—drinking from Jesus makes us both fruitful and full of His Spirit, which will flow from us to those around us.



The theme of shelters, coverings, and tents (sukkot) is also found repeatedly throughout the Bible. Isaiah speaks of the sukkah that the Lord will build in the last days over Mount Zion. He mentions the pillar of cloud and fire, reminding us of the way that God brought us through the desert to the land of Israel, the desert wanderings being one of the main themes of Sukkot. But now, in Isaiah 4, the emphasis is on the sukkah and the pillar of cloud and fire representing God’s presence and protection for Zion!

*“Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy. There will be a booth for shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain” (Isaiah 4:5-6).*

These concepts of the sukkah (tabernacle), of trees, and of rivers of water come together in a crescendo at the very end of the Bible, in the last chapters of the book of Revelation:

*“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘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. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’ And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” And he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son” (Revelation 21:1-7).*

*“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be*

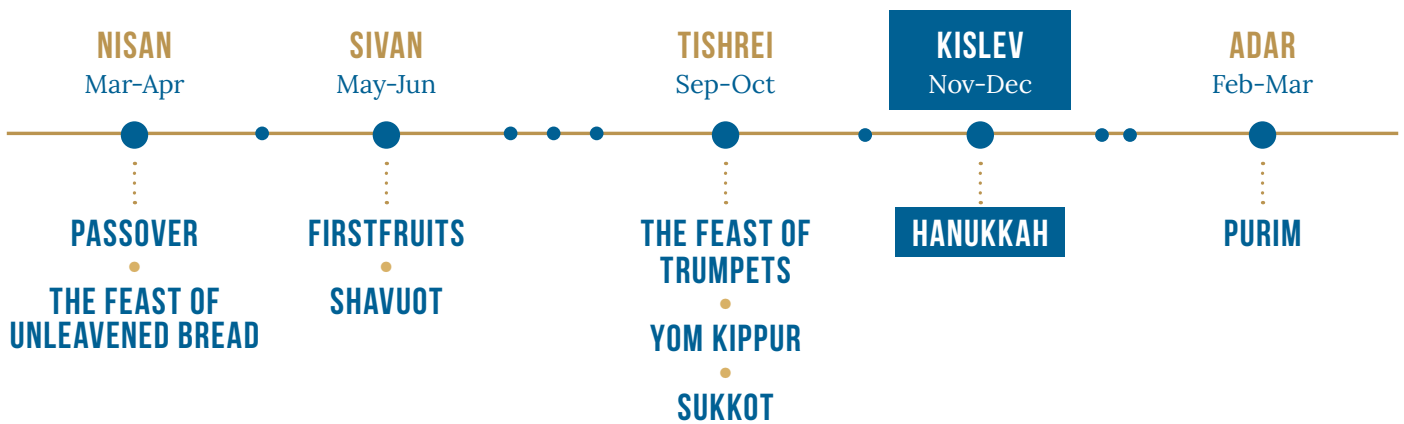
*on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the LORD God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever" (Revelation 22:1-5).*

This completes the holiday calendar of Leviticus 23, and you can see how it flows to give an overview of God's redemption plan from start to finish. However, there are two other holidays mentioned in the Bible that are not found in Leviticus 23, which occur between Sukkot and Passover. The first is Hanukkah and the second is Purim, which are celebrated mid-December and early spring, respectively.





# HANUKKAH



Read more about Hanukkah  
and the biblical feasts.



*“At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon” (John 10:22-23).*

Hanukkah is mentioned in the Bible by Jesus's best friend, John, who tells us that Jesus was in Jerusalem for Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication. However, this was not a feast commanded by God, a feast of the Lord. The event that Hanukkah celebrates occurred after the Hebrew Scriptures were written, in the time between the two Testaments. The holiday is famous for its nine-branch candlestick (instead of the seven-branch one mentioned in Exodus) and donuts! But the roots of the Feast of Dedication might be more biblical than most people realize.

Many people think of Hanukkah as a festival of light (which blurs with every other festival of light found in so many cultures and faiths), but the history of the festival and the stories that surround it are quite interesting. Leviticus 27 has laws on how a person can dedicate their house, and in Israel housewarming parties are called “Hanukkat Beit” parties—“dedication of the house” parties. The Hanukkah story is of a housewarming party for the ultimate house—God’s house. The Greeks had ruled Israel since Alexander the Great had invaded in 329 BC, and had become more and more tyrannical and restrictive, banning Torah study, circumcision, and sacrificing anything except pigs on the Temple altar. At one point, Jews were forced to eat the flesh of a pig that had been sacrificed in this way. This proved to be a step too far, and a violent rebellion led by the Maccabee family rose up to fight and take back power from the Greeks. The Temple had been defiled with all kinds of Greek statues and vile practices, but it was now time to cleanse and rededicate it. Hence the name, Hanukkah, which means dedication.

The extra-canonical books of Maccabees describe this historical reclamation of the Temple in 165 BC, as the Jewish people fought to take back the Temple, and for freedom to practice their faith. The letters of “Maccabee” in Hebrew are an acronym for “Who is like unto You among the gods?” (Exodus 15:11), which was like a rallying cry. It is seen as a time of cleansing from idolatry and of rededication. However, the books of the Maccabees don’t mention the famous miraculous stories about one day’s worth of oil lasting eight days in the temple menorah, which is the usual story told at Hanukkah. Legend has it that a small amount of lamp oil supernaturally kept the temple menorah lit eight times as long as it should have, after the Jewish Maccabees rededicated the Temple. The seven-stick menorah needed ritually pure oil to keep it perpetually burning, but there was only enough to last for one day, and it took seven days to produce this purified oil in accordance with tradition. Amazingly, the story

goes, the oil lasted not for one day, but for a full eight days, giving them enough time to produce more oil in the correct manner. The temple was rededicated to the God of Israel, and His order was restored. This is why the Hanukkah candlestick has nine branches instead of the usual seven of the menorah—to remind us of the eight-day miracle, and the one “servant light” from which all the others can be lit.

In Jewish communities around the world today, the oil miracle is celebrated with lots of oily food like donuts (sufganiot) and fried potato latkes, and children play games with a spinning top (called a dreidel) with the first letters of the words *A great miracle happened there* on each side. In Israel, however, the dreidel’s letters spell “A great miracle happened here”! There are many great themes we can pick up on here as those who love Jesus—our Servant Light, the Light of the World—and this festival of dedication can be a great time to dedicate ourselves again to Him, as His temple. The festival lasts for eight days, and a candle is added to the Hanukkah candlestick each day, until all eight are lit and shining brightly from the window. At this time at the end of the ninth month of Kislev, there are games, treats, and gifts for children, and lots of sufganiot!



The Talmud, however, mentions nothing of the political or heroic conquest of the Maccabees, but only tells the story of how the holy oil lasted seven days longer than expected. The story pops up in Tractate Shabbat 21b, almost as a side note. During instructions on candle lighting for Shabbat, the section explains about lighting candles for Hanukkah, and in the middle of that discussion, as if suddenly realizing that people may not know about the holiday, the question is asked, “What is Hanukkah?” The Talmud then goes on to discuss whether one should light one candle on the first day of Hanukkah and increase it each day until all eight are lit, or the other way around. The House of Shammai referred to the instructions about celebrating the Feast of Sukkot in Numbers 29 in which the number of bullocks sacrificed decreases each day, suggesting that we should do likewise with the candles. But the House of Hillel insisted that the number of candles should increase each day since holy things should increase, not decrease. Today we go with Hillel’s idea, and light an additional candle each day, until all eight are burning on the last day. But we can see here that the Jewish sages link the Hanukkah festival back to the eight days of Sukkot. And this is not by coincidence.

In Haggai 2, which was written around the time of the rebuilding of the Second Temple, we see God emphasizing a particular date, three times over—the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. That date is the twenty-fourth of the Jewish month of Kislev, which is the evening Hanukkah begins since Jewish days always start the evening before. God tells Haggai to consider that date in verses 10, 18, and 20. In verse 18 it reads:

*“Consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. Since the day that the foundation of the LORD’s temple was laid, consider...” (Haggai 2:18).*

The chapter is about consecrating the Temple, and what makes things “holy” and “defiled.” The people of Israel had been sinning so badly that God removed them from Israel and sent them to Babylon, but now they had come back, eager to follow God’s ways and restore His Temple. Beforehand, there was a time of curse and want, but now God promises blessing. It was, in essence, a national rededication. And did you know what they did to celebrate the rededication of the Second Temple? They had a Sukkot festival! You can read all about it in Nehemiah 8. Sukkot is often just called “THE feast,” and the connection could well explain why Hanukkah is eight days long. The Jewish feast of rededication goes all the way back to this particular celebration of Sukkot in Nehemiah’s day, held at an unusual time of year, in order to consecrate and dedicate the Second Temple—and the people themselves. It is interesting that it is focused on the theme of dedicating the Temple to God, and starting over afresh. God promises,

*“The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts” (Haggai 2:9).*

God also quizzes His prophet, Haggai, about what makes things unclean. Haggai answers God’s questions correctly, and God tells him the bad news:

*“So is it with this people, and with this nation before me, declares the LORD, and so with every work of their hands. And what they offer there is unclean” (Haggai 2:14).*

The first chapter of Haggai tells us that those who had returned from exile had been distracted from rebuilding the Temple, and had put their own houses first instead. God's house had been forgotten and neglected. But as the Temple was being built, God eagerly moved to bring His blessing—He is faithful even when we are not. How good God is! How merciful and eager to forgive! He is powerful enough to carry away all of our uncleanness and defilement, and longs to bless us abundantly. That Second Temple was indeed greater than the former, as Jesus walked around its colonnades, even on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, for the Feast of Dedication. There was no uncleanness in Him, but by His blood, we are made clean. He was there to celebrate Hanukkah, and we can celebrate it too, by rededicating the temple of our lives to Him.

Not only can we trace this Feast of Dedication back to the Sukkot celebrations of Ezra and Nehemiah's time as they began their fresh start after the exile in Babylon, but you'll never guess what date it was when the Ottoman Empire's hold on the Holy Land finally came to an end. General Allenby made his famous entrance into Jerusalem, dismounting from his horse and taking off his hat in respect for the magnitude of the moment, on Hanukkah, 24th Kislev, 1917. The Holy Land was no longer under Islamic rule, and though neither the British nor Israeli governments can be considered above reproach in all that has happened since then, it was a watershed moment for God's own land as the Jewish people would come back from their extremely long exile in the nations, and be planted back afresh in Israel once again. That certainly deserves a big housewarming party!

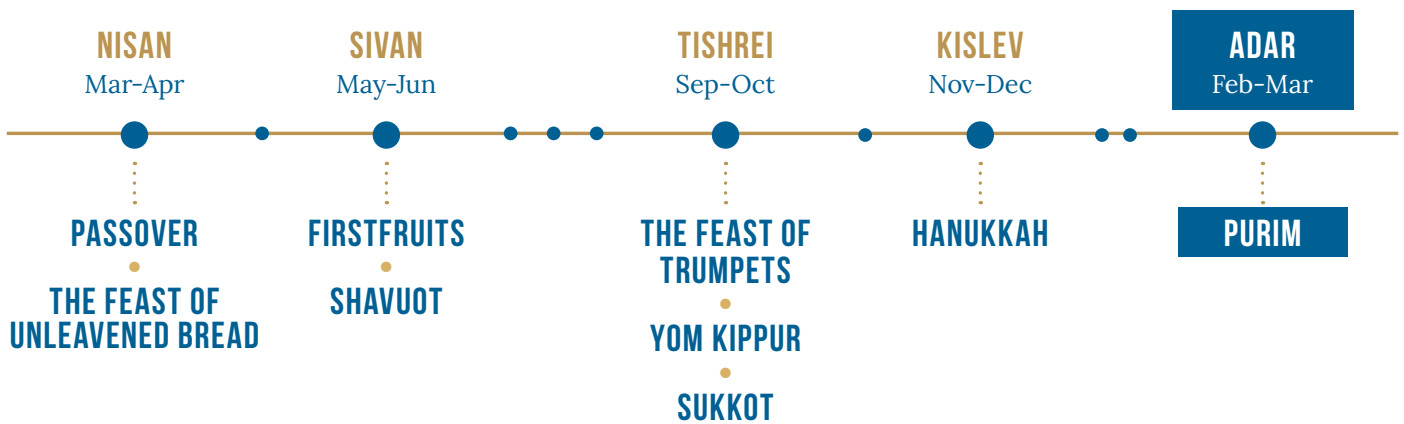
But just as we are glad to see God's word coming to pass in the physical restoration of Israel, we long to see the full spiritual restoration of Israel too:

*"For on my holy mountain, the mountain height of Israel, declares the LORD GOD, there all the house of Israel, all of them, shall serve me in the land. There I will accept them, and there I will require your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your sacred offerings. As a pleasing aroma I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered. And I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, the country that I swore to give to your fathers" (Ezekiel 20:40-42).*

What a massive Feast of Dedication THAT will be.



# PURIM



Read more about Purim and the biblical feasts.



Purim commemorates the narrow escape of the entire Jewish people from the threat of annihilation, and the courage of Queen Esther who bravely stood up for her people. The word *purim* means “lots,” due to the method that wicked Haman used to decide the date that they would wipe out the Jewish people in the provinces of Persia, and it is on this date that we celebrate today. Purim celebrates what looked like seriously bad luck turning right around under the sovereign rule of God.

*“And Mordecai recorded these things and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, obliging them to keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same, year by year, as the days on which the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor” (Esther 9:20-22).*

Purim is a time of joy and celebration across the Jewish world, a time to give gifts to those in need and have lots of fun! Traditionally, people wear fancy dress, or in Hebrew, *lehitchapes* (להתחפש). The Hebrew word is connected with the idea of seeking—to make yourself hidden, to mask yourself—so that others have to find you. And in fact, the whole story of Esther is a bit like a game of hide-and-seek.

First of all, you may have noticed that God Himself is hiding in the Book of Esther. He is not mentioned at all. Not even once! It is the only book in the Bible where God is hidden like this, but He is there. Those who look for Him can find Him, lurking between the lines, giving the strange impulse to King Xerxes to suddenly read the archives in the middle of the night, without which, the story would have ended very differently. God is there in the faith of Mordecai, in the determination of Esther, and He is the One to whom the Israelites pray and fast for three days in earnest. Although He has not come out and said it, God is the author of the Purim story and the Savior of the people of Israel. Yet again.

Secondly, Esther follows her cousin Mordecai’s instructions to keep her Jewish identity hidden. Esther wasn’t even her real name. That was her Persian name, meaning “star.” Her Jewish name was Hadassah: myrtle tree. Obedient as she was, Esther (or Hadassah) kept her identity a secret, only revealing it at the crucial time to her husband the king, and so was able to be a vessel for the deliverance of her entire

people. If Esther had failed—if she had disobeyed Mordecai and failed to be discreet, if she had not risked her life in asking for mercy from the king—would all Israel have perished? No! As Mordecai rightly warns her:

*“Do not think to yourself that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:13-14)*

The seed of Abraham, the lineage of the Messiah, was being carried by the people of Israel. The Scriptures we have today and the knowledge of the God of Israel had been entrusted into their hands, and at the right time would be distributed across the globe. What treasures for the world Israel carries! Would God allow them to be annihilated before the arrival of Jesus and the Good News could be taken to the nations? No! If Esther failed, He would have found another, but she found faith and courage and was rewarded by being the chosen vessel of God. You and I are able to read this story in our Bibles, with the help of the Holy Spirit, because of the faithfulness of God, and the brave, obedient cooperation of Esther.

Thirdly, there are three hidden kings in this story. Haman, the man behind the plot to destroy the Jewish people in the Book of Esther, was a direct descendant of King Agag, the Amalekite. King Agag is the first “hidden king.” Long ago, Haman’s ancestors, the Amalekites, had very unwisely decided to attack the newly liberated Israeli slaves as they stumbled out of Egypt—and not only that, they chose to attack the rear of the convoy where the old, the infirm, and the weak were found. The Israelites and Amalekites later met again in the battle in which Moses’s hands were held aloft in prayer, and God granted Israel victory. But still, many Amalekites remained, and their seething hatred of Israel lived on. God tells the Israelites later on their journey,

*“Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came out of Egypt, how he attacked you on the way when you were faint and weary, and cut off your tail, those who were lagging behind you, and he did not fear God. Therefore when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your enemies around you, in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget” (Deuteronomy 25:17-19).*

But the Israelites did not do a very good job of remembering to blot them out. The Amalekites continued to trouble and attack Israel, and eventually, the task was given to King Saul (in 1 Samuel 15) to finish the job. Saul, son of Kish, is the second hidden king in the background story. Defying strict instructions from God, Saul, son of Kish, spared the Amalekite king and his family. Although Samuel the prophet rebuked Saul and went on to kill Agag himself, King Agag's line continued. Saul's disobedience eventually resulted in the appearance of Haman the Amalekite, yet again bent on the annihilation of God's chosen people while they were in exile. However, Haman was not prepared for his encounter with Mordecai, who was, amazingly, a descendant of Kish.

And this brings us to the last king: the King of Kings. King Saul had failed to carry out God's instructions and kill King Agag, so God restaged the event later, in Persia. The anti-Semitic spirit of Amalek rears its ugly head in Haman, and the Spirit of God filled another son of Kish to bring completion to the circle, and finish him.

There is an unseen battle going on. The story of Purim is a multi-layered story of secrets and surprises. Satan, the real hidden enemy, failed in yet another attempt to wipe out Israel, and prevent the unborn Messiah from being revealed to the world. Unseen evil trying to stop the appearance of the ultimate good... but pointlessly fighting against an invisible and unbeatable God. We can rejoice that, as Paul writes,

*"They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen" (Romans 9:4-5).*

The story of Esther is a great testimony to God's might, protection, and faithfulness to His people, and also to the whole world. But the satanic spirit of Amalek has not given up its vendetta against God's chosen people. It can be seen arising in the inexplicable hatred of Jews throughout the ages—even from the church at times. Hitler was clearly in its grip, and in the tumultuous Middle East, we can also see this same desire of Amalek regularly vocalized. Of course, now the threat from Iran (Persia!) looms again. The people of Israel have never been blameless, but the number of attempts to eradicate them entirely is surely extraordinary to the rational observer. There is more going on than meets the eye. There is a cosmic battle hidden under the surface.



God is serious about His plans and He will carry them out. He is passionate about His people, the “apple of His eye,” and He will protect them. The fact that He guarded them so fiercely has brought immeasurable blessing to all peoples. He will complete His salvation plan from start to finish for all the families of the earth, just as He purposed. And He will be faithful to His promise forever:

*“I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3).*





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