



The Jewish Holidays -

A Simplified Overview of the Feasts of the LORD

אלה מועדי יהוה מקראי קדש אשר תקראו אתם במועדם:

These are the set times of the LORD, the sacred occasions, which you shall celebrate each at its appointed time. - Leviticus 23:4

LEVITICUS 23 is the single chapter of the entire *Tanakh* that sums up everything. God's eternal plan -- from chaos to eternity -- is ingeniously revealed through the nature and timing of the Seven annual Feasts of the LORD. In less than seven minutes, you will come to realize that the entire human race now exists between two of these feasts. Let us survey God's calendar in its essence.



Sacrifice is the major feature of the feasts. Believers in Mashiach are not responsible to keep these feasts, but knowledge of them enhances our faith. Our Lord kept every one of them without fail, even celebrating Pesach on His last earthly night. Now I will tell you what the feasts are called, when they happen and why they remain significant.

It was on Mount Sinai that God gave Moses the dates and observances of the eight major feasts for the Jewish people to observe. Here are their names:

1. The Sabbath Day (i.e., Shabbat, a weekly feast)
2. Passover (*Pesach*) - *Nisan 14*
3. Unleavened Bread (*Chag Hamotzi*) - *Nisan 15-22*
4. First Fruits (*Yom habikkurim*) - *Nisan 16*
5. Pentecost (*Shavu'ot*) - *Sivan 6*
6. Trumpets (*Yom Teru'ah*) - *Tishri 1*
7. Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) - *Tishri 10*
8. Tabernacles (*Sukkot*) - *Tishri 15*

When do they happen? God's calendar is based on the phases of the moon. Each month in a lunar calendar begins with a new moon. Pesach falls on the first full moon of Spring. The first three feasts, Pesach, Unleavened Bread and First Fruits fall in March and April. The fourth one, Shavu'ot, marked the summer harvest and occurs in late May or early June. The last three feasts, Trumpets, Yom Kippur and Sukkot happen in September and October.



The Spring Feasts

1. **Passover (*Pesach*)**. Leviticus 23:5 specifies that the festival year begins with Passover on “the fourteenth day of the first month” (Nisan 15). Passover is the Feast of Salvation. In both testaments, the blood of the Lamb delivers from slavery – the Jew from Egypt, the Christian from sin. Think about the tenth plague in Exodus 12:5 when Egypt’s first born sons died while the angel of death “passed over” the Jewish homes with the blood of the lamb on their door posts. In the *B’rit Chadashah*, Jesus serves as the sacrificial lamb. It is no coincidence that our Lord Himself was sacrificed on Passover. In Egypt the Jew marked his house with the blood of the lamb. Today the Christian marks his house – his body, “the house of the spirit” with the blood of Christ. Passover, then, represents our salvation.



2. **Unleavened Bread (*Chag HaMotzi*)**. Leviticus 23:6 puts the second feast on the next night: “On the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread unto the Lord; seven days ye must eat unleavened bread.” Leaven or yeast in the Bible symbolized sin and evil. Unleavened bread, eaten over a period of time, symbolized a holy walk, as with the Lord. Unleavened bread, in the *B’rit Chadashah* [New Testament] is, of course, the body of our Lord. He is described as “the Bread of Life” (*Lechem haChayim*). He was born in Bethlehem, which, in Hebrew, means, “House of Bread” (*Bet Lechem*).



Look at the matzah and see that it is striped: “By His stripes we are healed”; pierced: “They shall look upon me whom they’ve pierced,” and pure, without any leaven, as His body was without any sin. And the Passover custom of burying, hiding and then resurrecting the second of three pieces of matzot (the middle piece), presents the Gospel (*Afikomen*).



3. **First Fruits (*Yom Habikkurim*).** “On the morrow after the Sabbath” following Unleavened Bread, Leviticus 23:11 schedules First Fruits, the feast for acknowledging the fertility of the land He gave the Israelites. They were to bring the early crops of their spring planting and “wave the sheaf before the Lord.” The modern church has come to call this feast “Easter,” named after *Ishtar*, the pagan goddess of fertility. We continue to revere objects of fertility such as the rabbit and the egg, but the First Fruits celebration was to be over God’s replanting of the earth in the spring. Today this feasts celebrates the resurrection of the Lord on First Fruits, which indeed occurred (plus, eventually, the resurrection of the entire Church!)



4. **Pentecost (*Shavu’ot*).** Leviticus 23:16 says, “Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the Lord.” In late May or early June, Shavu’ot marked the summer harvest. Leviticus 23:17 requires an offering of two loaves of bread, *baked with leaven*. These loaves symbolize the church being comprised of both Jew and Gentile.



A review of the first four feasts reveals that Yeshua was crucified on Pesach, buried on Unleavened Bread, raised on First Fruits and sent the *Ruach Hakkodesh* on Shavu’ot. Because we have not yet seen the fulfillment of feast number five - Trumpets - we remain under the orders of Shavu’ot.



The Fall Feasts

5. **Trumpets (*Yom Teru'ah*)**. Ever since Isaac was spared by virtue of the ram being caught in the thicket by its horn, God seems to have enjoyed the trumpet. He used it when Joshua conquered Jericho. In Leviticus 25:8-10, he specified its use in having trumpets “proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof” (that quotation appears today on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, assuring us that America was founded by Bible readers). Leviticus 23:24 requires that, “in the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a Sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets.”



The Feast of Trumpets occurs in September. This jump in time from the Feast of Pentecost in May or June seems to represent the Church Age in God's planning, since the trumpet unquestionably represents the Rapture of the Church. The trumpet was the signal for the field workers to come into the Temple. The high priest actually blew the trumpet so that the faithful would stop harvesting to worship. Now, when the trumpet sounds in accordance with 1 Corinthians 15:51-3, living believers will cease their harvest and rise from the earth. The Church will be taken out of the world.

6. **Atonement (*Yom Kippur*)**. Leviticus 23:27 provides a day of confession, the highest of holy days. “Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a Day of Atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord.” This is the one feast that is not fulfilled by the church, because the Church owes no atonement. The Church is not innocent, of course, but it is exonerated. The Day of Atonement will be fulfilled in a wonderful way when the Lord returns at His Second Coming.





7. **Tabernacles (*Sukkot*).** Leviticus 23:34 says, “The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the Lord.” God wanted to celebrate the fact that He provided shelter for the Israelites in the wilderness. Each year on Tabernacles, devout Jews build little shelters or “booths” (*sukkot*) outside their houses and worshipped in them. Tabernacles represents the Lord’s shelter in the world to come (*olam habah*), His great Tabernacle to exist in Jerusalem during the Kingdom Age. The Lord will establish His Tabernacle in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 37:26), and the world will come every year to appear before the King and worship Him (Zechariah 14:16-17).



Chanukah, by the way, was not given by God on Mount Sinai, but was prophesied in Daniel 8:9-14, and took place in 165 BCE when the Temple was rededicated. Now you probably agree that Christianity’s Jewish roots offer an eye to the future as well as the past. The next time someone mentions “The Seven Feasts of Israel,” you’ll realize they’re really talking about the Seven Feasts of all time!