

The Festivals of Yahweh

There are seven festivals that Yahweh prescribed in the Torah (Ex. 12; Lev. 23-24; Num. 28; Deut. 16): four in the spring and three in the fall. The four spring festivals foreshadow Christ's first coming, and the three fall festivals foreshadow Christ's second coming. We will only be dealing with the spring festivals as they relate to the Passover Festival.

The Passover

Passover got its name because it celebrated the night that Yahweh *passed over* the firstborn males of all families who sacrificed a lamb in their place (Heb. 11:28). Their faith in Yahweh, that He would do what He promised, is what saved them that night. Yahweh emphasized the importance of Passover and the feat of unleavened bread by stating that the Israelites were to celebrate the two forever and those who did not participate would be cut off from Him and removed from the community (Ex. 12:14).

Yahweh required each family on the 10th of Nissan (the seventh month of the Jewish calendar) to choose a male lamb that was spotless and healthy to be sacrificed in place of the family. For four days the lamb would be inspected for imperfections, and on the 14th of Nissan it would be sacrificed. The blood of the lamb would be placed on the frame and above and to either side of the door. Yahweh directed that the Israelites roast the lamb in the same way done by the nomads, rather than eating it raw or boiled, the way many of the surrounding pagans ate their sacrificial meat. Roasting the lamb allowed for the lamb to be placed on the table undivided and unchanged in its essential structure and appearance. This would have strengthened the impression of the substitute nature of the lamb. The eating of the lamb was necessary in order to partake of the blessings of Yahweh.

The lamb is a typology of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ (Jn. 1:29, 36; 1 Cor. 5:6-8; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 7:10; 21:22; 22:21). Just as the lamb would die in place of the family for their sins in Egypt, so Christ would die for the sins of the world (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8; Gal. 1:3-4; Heb. 9:24-27; 1 Jn. 2:2). The blood that covers the door to their house, marking them as purified, is a foreshadowing and symbol of the blood of Christ that covers our hearts and purifies us (Lev. 17:11; John 19:24; Heb. 9:24-27; 1 Jn. 2:1; 5:6).

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

The Unleavened Bread festival started on the 15th of Nissan and lasted for seven days. It would be a time of removing all the yeast from the house and eating bread without yeast. Biblically yeast is symbolic of sin. Thus this week was a time where the Israelites reflected on the past year and repented of their sins as they ate bread without yeast.

It is Passover and the Unleavened Bread festival that Christ fulfilled when He celebrated them in the upper room with His disciples, which has since come to be known as the Lord's Supper (Lk. 22:17-20; 1 Jn. 14; Cor. 11:23-29). Christ stated that the bread was His body and the wine His blood, broken and given for them.

Feast of Firstfruits

The Feast of Firstfruits, was celebrated on the day after the Sabbath that followed Passover (the Sunday after Passover). Firstfruits was not to be celebrated until Israel entered the Promised Land, and then it would celebrate the first fruits of the barley harvest (the first harvest of the year). The people were to offer up the first fruits of their barley harvest as an acknowledgement that it was Yahweh who had given them the land and the harvest and as a demonstration of trust that He would provide more. The Israelites also offered a lamb, flour, and wine, all representing Yahweh's provisions of spiritual and physical food and drink for His people.

Passover was celebrated on a specific date of the month, and it would fall on a different day of the week with each passing year. Because Firstfruits was celebrated on a specific day of the week, the number of days between Passover and Firstfruits would be different each year.

Christ died on the day of the Passover, and it was three days later that Christ rose from the dead on the day of Firstfruits. Thus Christ became the "first fruits" from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20) with the promise that believers would follow Him in our own resurrections and into heaven (the Promised Land).

The Feast of Weeks (Pentecost)

The Feast of Weeks was celebrated at the end of the spring harvest, 50 days after Passover (specifically, the day after the seventh Sabbath). This day celebrated the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, and the Israelites would offer up the first fruits of the wheat harvest in the same manner as they had previously with the barley harvest. Thus, this became the second firstfruits offering to Yahweh of the harvest season. This was the only festival where the Israelites were commanded to eat bread baked with yeast (a symbol of sin) in it.

This feast was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit indwelt the disciples for the first time. In this way, the Law that had been given to the Hebrews at Mount Sinai was now written on the hearts of the disciples in fulfillment of what the prophets had said (Jer. 31:31-34; Joel 2:28-32; Ezek. 11:17-21). Just as the Law came to Israel through the pillar of fire at Mount Sinai so the Holy Spirit also came as pillars of fire to indwell the believers. Thus, the believer becomes a second firstfruits resurrection from the dead through the death and resurrection of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (2 Thess. 2:13; James 1:18; Rev. 14:4). By the Second Testament the Gentiles were associated with yeast and sin and were considered unclean. In Acts 2 we learn that people from many different nations (Gentiles) accepted Christ, thus the allowance of bread with yeast.

Feast of Trumpets

The next three festivals were celebrated in the seventh month of the Jewish religious calendar in the spring and foreshadow the second coming of Jesus Christ. The Feast of Trumpets was celebrated on the 1st of Tishri and was a day on which the people of Israel gathered as a nation and presented themselves to Yahweh for repentance. This was signaled by the priests blowing a long and large ram's horn (shophar) that produced a dull, far-reaching tone.

It is not clear how this feast will be fulfilled in the second coming of Christ, but it will have something to do with the blowing of a trumpet and the gathering together of His people. We are told in the Second Testament that a trumpet will sound, calling all believers to meet Christ in the

air (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16-17). It will also assemble the Israelites and herald the Day of Yahweh when He will again resume His dealings with His people Israel in Daniel's seventieth week (Jer. 32:37).

The Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement was celebrated on the 10th of Tishri. This day was a fast rather than a feast, and the people were to “humble” themselves before Yahweh in repentance and atonement for their sins. On this day, the high priest would lay his hands on a goat and symbolically transfer the sins of the people onto the goat. He would then lead the goat deep into the wilderness, where it would become lost, representing the removal of Israel's sin. This goat became known as the scapegoat. The high priest would then take a second goat and sacrifice it, collecting its blood in a bowl. It would then take the blood into the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and pour the blood out onto the Ark of the Covenant. The sacrifices on this day atoned for all the sins of ignorance and only lasted for the year to come. They also enabled Yahweh to dwell with the people through the tabernacle for another year.

Christ fulfilled this in a small way when He came, died on the cross, and became our sin offering and atonement. But it will not be until His second coming that Yahweh will purify His people who have returned to Him in repentance and self-affliction as a result of His chastening during the Tribulation period (Zech. 12:10; 13:1; Heb. 9:28). It is on this day that we will experience the final and complete atonement for our sins.

The Feast of Tabernacles (Booths)

The Feast of Tabernacles began on the 15th of Tishri and lasted for seven days. On the Feast of tabernacles the people built booths out of branches and lived under these for the duration of this seven-day festival as a reminder of their life in the wilderness. They presented many offerings during this holiday (Num. 29:12-38), and it revolved around the harvest of grapes. This was a week during which they looked back at the life of slavery from which Yahweh had delivered them, praised Him for the tabernacle and His glory that dwelt with them, and looked forward to the day that Yahweh would bring the fullness of His kingdom and glory on earth. On the eighth day (day after the Sabbath) they would return to their permanent dwellings.

Christ gave a glimpse of this when He came and tabernacled with us (Jn. 1:14; the word *dwelt* is *tabernacle* in the Greek) in His first coming and revealed His glory to John, James, and Peter on the day of Tabernacles (Matt. 17:1-8). But this will be fully fulfilled in His second coming through His millennium reign and then the new earth, sky, and Jerusalem (Zech. 14:16; Rev. 21).

The Jewish Calendar

Israel had two calendars: one civil and one religious. The religious calendar began with the month of Nisan. Yahweh commanded Israel that Nisan was to mark the beginning of the new year at the first celebrated Passover, the night before they left Egypt (Ex. 12:1-2).

Hebrew Calendar¹					
Month	Sacred Year	Civil Year	Day/Festival	Modern Calendar	Agricultural Season
Nisan	1	7	1 New Moon 14 Passover 15-21 Unleavened Bread 17 Firstfruits	Mar.-Apr.	Spring Equinox, Latter Rains, Flood Season, Barley Season, Flax Harvest
Iyyar	2	8		Apr.-May	Dry Season, Apricots
Sivan	3	9	7 Feast of Weeks (Pentecost)	May-Jun.	Wheat Harvest, Early Figs and Grapes
Tammuz	4	10		Jun.-Jul.	Hot Dry Season, Grape Harvest
Ab	5	11		Jul.-Aug.	Intense Heat, Olive Harvest
Elul	6	12		Aug.-Sept.	Dates and Summer Figs
Tishri	7	1	1 Feast of Trumpets 10 Day of Atonement 15-21 Feast of Tabernacles	Sept.-Oct.	Early Rains, Plowing, Seed Time
Heshvan	8	2		Oct.-Nov.	Rains, Winter Figs, Wheat and Barley Sown
Chislev	9	3	25 Dedication	Nov.-Dec.	Winter Begins, Green Pastures
Tebeth	10	4		Dec.-Jan.	Rains, Snow on High Ground
Shebat	11	5		Jan.-Feb.	Almond Trees Blossom
Adar	12	6	15 Feast of Purim	Feb.-Mar.	Spring, Latter Rains, Citrus Fruit Harvest

The Israelites observed a solar year, which contains 365 days, and a lunar month. Lunar months have 29 and 30 days alternately. The Egyptians followed these alternations carefully, giving them six months of 29 days and six months of 30 days. The Israelites, however, followed the Mesopotamians, who observed 12 months of 30 days. All three civilizations made up the difference between 12 lunar months and one solar year by inserting another month every few years.²

¹ Don J. Davis. *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*, p. 150.

² See Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, Part I, Chapter 2: "Divisions of Time."