

Jesus and the Seven Feasts of Israel

Portions adapted from <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jewish-feasts.html> and <https://www.wycliffe.org/feast/7-feasts-that-point-to-christ>

When my two were young, "Where's Waldo?" was a very popular children's book. If you are not familiar with Waldo, each double page spread of the book displayed a very crowded scene of an airport, a carnival, a town, with literally hundreds – thousands – of tiny figures, like ants on a page, doing different activities which were also fun to look at and talk about. But the goal, who we were especially looking for, was always to find Waldo, wearing his signature red striped shirt and matching cap, somewhere in the midst of this messy crowd. For Christians, sorting through the prophecies and symbolisms of the Old Testament can feel similar, like an intricate game of "Where's Jesus?" But as He told those two disciples on the Emmaus road, there have always been plenty of clues to help us find him.

Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. Luke 24:27



According to Jesus, God had placed symbolic guides throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, not only to His plan for the ages and the salvation of all people, but also specifically pointing to the person and work of the Messiah. From these hints any God-seeking Hebrew should have been able to discern how Jesus fit the pattern of their long promised Messiah.

For us Christians now reading our Bibles after the fact, probably the biggest set of such clues can be found in the seven feasts of Israel, as God had instituted them in Leviticus, chapter 23; which is where we are going today, not only to look for Jesus, but perhaps also other hints of days yet to come.

The Hebrew word for "feasts," literally means "appointed times." God carefully orchestrated the timing and sequence of each of these seven feasts, spread over seven months of the Jewish calendar, to reveal to us a special story. They are still celebrated by observant Jews today. But for both Jews and non-Jews who have placed their faith in the Jewish Messiah, these special days demonstrate both the present and future work of our redemption as provided through Christ Jesus, that Messiah, God's Son our Savior.

The first four of the seven feasts occur during the springtime (Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, and Pentecost); these have already been fulfilled by the life of Jesus as His story is told in the New Testament.

The final three holidays (Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and Tabernacles,) occur during the fall, all within a short fifteen-day period. Many Bible scholars believe that these fall feasts have not yet been fulfilled by Jesus. But, just as the four spring feasts were fulfilled literally and right on the actual feast day in connection with **Christ's first coming**, these three feasts will also be fulfilled literally in connection to **Christ's second coming**; this being the future

“blessed hope,” spoken of by the Apostles, for which all believers in Jesus Christ still wait (Titus 2:13).

Here then, is a simplified outline of the prophetic significance for us as found in the seven feasts of Israel which point to the coming Messiah.



First there is **Passover** (Leviticus 23:4-8). For the Hebrew people, this feast remembers the last plague in Egypt, when the angel of death “passed over” all those who applied the blood of an unblemished lamb – a lamb without any faults – to the doors of their home. The Israelites were instructed to take a bundle of hyssop and dip it into the blood held in a basin. Reaching up, they were to paint it on the top lintel of their doors and then the two sides of the frame (Exodus 12). Perhaps it is just a coincidence for us to notice after the fact, but can you see the imagery? Bottom to top, side to side: the motion formed a cross. Then they went inside their homes to spend the night feasting on the lamb, protected by the blood as the death angel passed over.

In the New Testament, when John the Baptist pointed at Jesus and declared, “*look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,*” he prophetically connected Jesus to this Passover feast day; on which -- as all four Gospels record -- Jesus’ death did occur when like that “lamb without blemish,” Jesus was also silently led to slaughter ((John 1:29, Isaiah 53:7,1 Peter 1:19). It was not by coincidence that exactly at 3p.m. while all the Passover lambs were being slaughtered in the Temple, at that very moment on the cross, Jesus bowed His head and died. Jesus, “the lamb of God” by His death caused the death we deserve to pass over us as we sit within His protection, feasting with Him ...Remember? *This is my body broken and my blood shed ... for you.*



Next, beginning on the same day as Passover and lasting for seven days, was also the feast of **Unleavened Bread** (Leviticus 23:6). In their haste to leave Egypt, there was no time for the Israelites to add leaven (yeast) to their bread. Then in the wilderness after the unleavened bread ran out, for the next forty years of their travel to the Promised Land, the Israelites ate “*manna,*” what Moses called God’s “*bread from Heaven.*” (Exodus 16:4). So during the Passover week, remembering how God had freed them from captivity and fed them through the wilderness, the Jews eat nothing leavened.

Leaven (yeast) often represents sin and decay in the Bible. Once mixed in, yeast becomes an inseparable part of the bread; the same is true for sin’s effect on our lives. Thus unleavened bread also represents Jesus’ sinless life, which God has sent to sustain us through our wilderness wanderings. To the Jews of His day, Jesus boldly declared *I am bread of life.* So, not only does Jesus cover our sins but He also nourishes our souls throughout our long journey to God’s Promised Land, our heavenly home! (John 6:35, John 14:1-3).

Then, and always to be held on the first day of the week (Sunday), following the Sabbath after Passover, comes the **Feast of First Fruits**; the first of three harvest celebrations. This feast happening at the beginning of the growing season to thank God for the coming harvest (Leviticus 23:10). Although they didn’t know it at the time, the children of Israel were celebrating what would become for Christians our most important day: **Easter.**



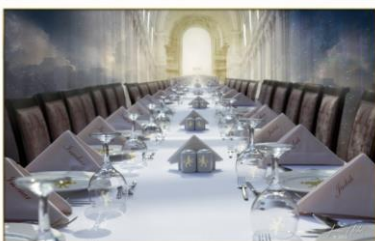
Isn't it interesting that this "third day" celebration always had to happen on a Sunday, which was the same day that Jesus was raised from the dead? In his letter to the Corinthians (1st 15:20) Paul referred to Jesus as the **first fruits of the dead**, because He was just the very first of the great harvest of souls yet to come — including you and me — who will also rise from their graves to eternal life on that day when Christ returns to call all God's children home (1st Thessalonians 4:16-18).

Next, the third spring festival – the second of three harvest celebrations – comes seven weeks after the **Feast of First Fruits** (Leviticus 23:16). Though it was originally called the **Feast of 7 Weeks**, since it occurs exactly 50 days after First Fruits – once again always on a Sunday – by Jesus' day, it had come to be known as **Pentecost**. Traditionally, along with a sheaf of the newly harvested grain, the Israelites were also expected to wave two leavened loaves of baked bread before the Lord.



God's plan has always been to save far more souls than just the Israelites. During His ministry, Jesus lamented to His disciples "*the harvest is great, but the workers are few*" and He instructed them to *pray to the Lord of the harvest to send more laborers into the field*. Then for forty days following His resurrection and just before His ascension to Heaven, Jesus instructed His followers that He was now sending them out into all the world to baptize and make disciples of all people; but first He told them wait in Jerusalem for the power from God to come upon them. Ten days later, on **Pentecost Sunday**, with the arrival of the Holy Spirit, the Church was born and the soul harvest began in earnest. Like yeast through bread, this message has continued spreading rapidly through both the Jewish and Gentile world (the two leavened loaves of bread), continuing that harvest all the way up to us, today!

Now we begin to speak of things yet to come. Following these four spring festivals, there is a long season of quiet, until the first day of the seventh month of the year on which comes the **Feast of Trumpets**. Since, according to the Hebrew Calendar, this is also New Years Day, it came to be known as **Rosh Ha Shana** – which means the "*head*", or the "*Start of a New Year.*" On this day, **with the sounding of trumpets**, the Israelites were called together for a sacred rest from all their labor (Leviticus 23:24). All work ceases as they now celebrate the completion of the harvest season. Twice in our New Testament, the Apostle Paul wrote that at the end of the age, the rapture of the church would be announced with the **blast of Heavenly trumpets**, when the dead in Christ rise to God's call as Jesus descends to welcome His children home the completion of God's harvest and the beginning of a new year of God's reign on Earth (1 Corinthians 15:52-53, 1st Thessalonians 4:16-18).



Jesus once told His listeners a strange parable of a wedding feast that a king held for his son. Many were invited, but claimed to be too busy with their own matters to come, so the king sent his servants out onto the highways to invite "*as many as you can find.*" All who came were then welcomed to the feast, it mattered not who they were, but only that they were wearing "wedding garments" (Matthew 22). Doesn't this sound just like the

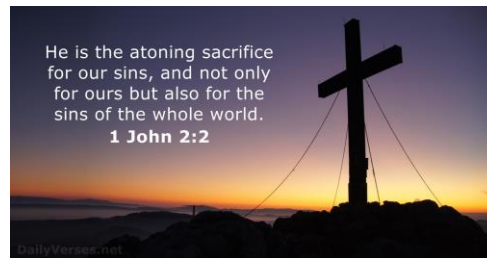
salvation offered to all who receive by God's grace through their faith in the salvation – the wedding garments – provided by Christ Jesus? (Romans 13:14, Galatians 3:27)

The book of Revelation declares, "*Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb*" (Revelation 19:9 NLT). As symbolized by the feast of Trumpets at the head of the New Year, God is preparing us to celebrate the coming of the New Heavens and New Earth.

Then ten days following Rosh Ha Shana – the number ten always signifying law and judgment – comes the **Day of Atonement** (Leviticus 16, 23:26-32). Only on this day, could the high priest enter the Holy of Holies within the Temple to make a sacrifice in atonement for the people's sin. All the Israelites would fearfully wait for the high priest to come back out, thus indicating that their sins had been forgiven and the nation was granted another year of existence.

For Christians the Day of Atonement need no longer be feared, because as the book of Hebrews teaches, Christ, *our High Priest, entered the Holy of Holies once for all time and, having made the sacrifice with His own blood, He sat down at the right hand of God the Father to wait for the defeat of his enemies* (Hebrews 9:12, 10:12-14).

The Apostle John assures us...



For those who come to Christ Jesus in faith, the need for a Day of Atonement was rendered void by His death on the cross — our debt has been paid!

However, for Israel, there is yet to come a final **Day of Atonement**. Bible scholars believe that this feast prophetically points to the day of the Second Coming of Jesus when He will return to earth and the Jewish remnant will "*look upon Him whom they have pierced,*" repent of their sins, and receive Him as their Messiah (Zechariah 12:10 and Romans 11:1-6, 25-36).

For the Hebrew people, this will be their joyous last Day of Atonement. But what about those who refuse God's grace, who demand to be judged based on the works of their life? God is gracious but God is also just! The Book of Revelation speaks of one final day of Atonement at the end of time, where all who demand justice for themselves will come to stand before a **great white throne**. Then, after they have been judged *according to what they have done*, if their name is not found written in the "*Lamb's Book of Life,*" their own life will be sacrificed in payment for their sins as they are cast into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:11-14). This is not a pleasant thought to dwell upon, but for those who refuse God's Grace all that remains is Judgment, *for the wages of sin is death* (Romans 6:23).

But that is not the sad ending of this story, for there is yet one more festival to celebrate, **The Festival of Tabernacles (Tents)**. Following the Day of Atonement, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month – after the last of the harvest has been gathered in -- the Hebrew people were instructed to celebrate for a whole week, camping out in the fields in tents, doing no work, just enjoying the life that God has provided for them.

Many scholars believe that this feast day points to the Lord's promise that He will once again "tabernacle" with His people when He returns to reign over all the world (Micah 4:1-7). On that day, there will be no more death and suffering, He Himself will wipe away every tear from our eyes (Revelation 21:4). And all God's children whether Hebrew or Gentile will dwell peacefully along the banks of the River of Life, fishing from the river and eating fruit from the fruit trees growing along its banks (Ezekiel 47:1-12, Revelation 22:1-5).

The day of Christ's return and the years to follow is the "blessed hope," that Christians still must patiently wait for, but what a day that will be!

Unlike searching for Waldo in a messy world, we who have found that Christ now lives in our heart can find God's wisdom all throughout His Holy Word. As these feasts of Israel have shown, we can learn not only of God's intentional love, but also His enduring plans for the future of all humanity along with other clues He has left us, foreshadowing the best, which is yet to come.

Thus, on this second Sunday of Easter, as the Apostle Paul wrote to Christians everywhere.



Let's pray about this.