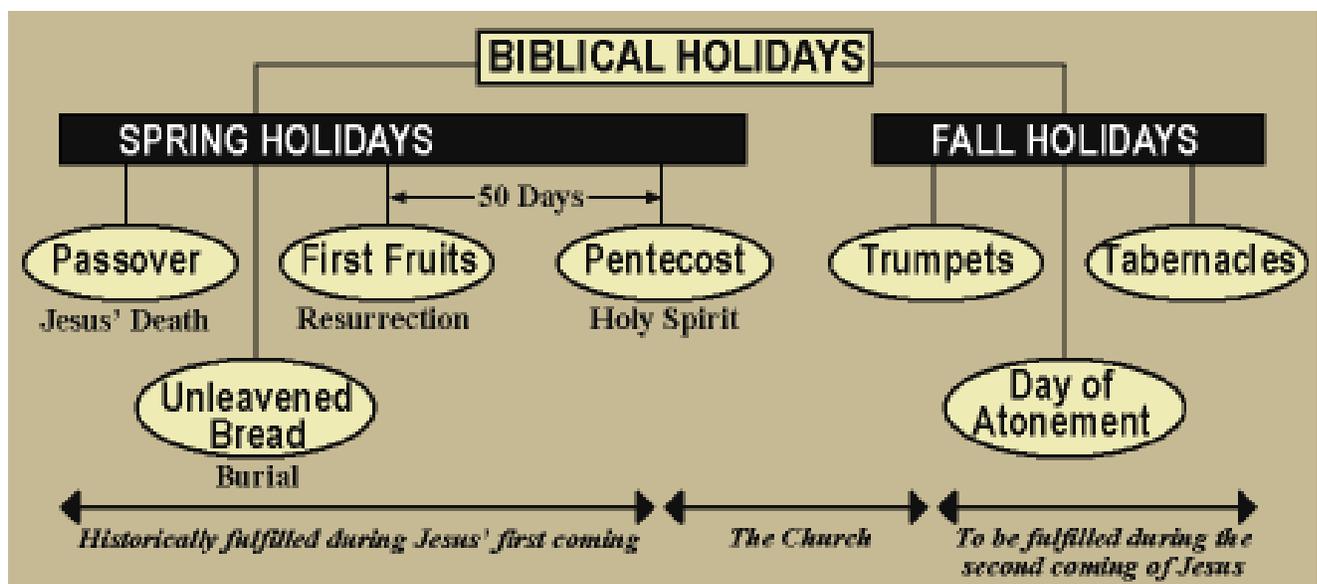


# An Introduction to the Feasts of Israel

The feasts of Israel are religious celebrations remembering God’s great acts of salvation in the history of His people. The term “feasts” in Hebrew literally means “appointed times” and in Scripture the feasts often are called “holy convocations.”

They are times God has appointed for holy purposes – times in which the Lord meets with men and women. While there are many religious celebrations in Jewish history and custom, seven are most significant: Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles.

God established the timing and sequence of these feasts to reveal to us a special story – most significantly, the work of the Messiah in the redemption of mankind and the establishment of His Kingdom on earth.



## Why seven feasts?

The number seven is significant in Scripture. It is tied to completeness or fullness. For example, God rested on the seventh day after creation, not because He was tired but because His work was complete and He was fully satisfied in it. The cycle of the seven-

day week provided the basis for much of Israel's worship. In addition, the seventh month features four of the seven feasts; the seventh year and the 50th year (the year of Jubilee, following seven cycles of seven years) also are significant.

There are several key truths to keep in mind as we study the feasts:

- ▶ The Lord established the feasts and gave them to Israel.
- ▶ The feasts were based on the Jewish lunar calendar (12 months of 29 or 30 days per month).
- ▶ The feasts relate to Israel's spring and fall agricultural seasons; Israel was and still is, to a great extent, an agricultural nation.
- ▶ They picture the timing, sequence and significance of the Messiah's redemptive work.
- ▶ Though the feasts were given to Israel, every person is invited to meet with God and receive His gracious blessings through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- ▶ There is a binding relationship between Israel and the church even though they are distinct entities with distinct promises. God's unconditional covenant with Abraham promised, "In thy (Abraham's) seed shall all nations be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). "Every blessing which the true Church now enjoys and every hope she anticipates come out of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants which God made with Israel"
- ▶ The number of feasts – seven – relates to the Biblical number for completion. The full work and revelation of Messiah/Christ is pictured in the seven feasts.
- ▶ All seven feasts are found in Leviticus 23; additional passages in the Old and New Testaments also address the feasts.

“To summarize, these seven feasts of the Lord are God’s appointed times during which He will meet with men for holy purposes. When completed, these seven special holidays will triumphantly bring an end to this age and usher in a glorious ‘Golden Age’”

### **Why study the feasts?**

There are several good reasons to study the feasts: 1) to remember God’s goodness; 2) to understand more fully His divine revelation through “types;” 3) to increase our knowledge of God’s plan through the work of His eternal Son; 4) to more fully appreciate the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf; and 5) to joyfully anticipate the days in which Jesus will return and establish His Kingdom on earth.

### **Why do so many Jewish people observe the feasts but fail to grasp their significance?**

In part, because they have added so many man-made rules and customs to the Lord’s feasts that they are consumed with religious ritual rather than with zeal for God. In addition, the hardening of the Jewish heart has provided opportunity for Gentile believers to be grafted into the true church, made up of those “from every nation, tribe, people, and language” who worship Jesus as Lord (Rev. 7:9; see also Rom. 11:11-12).

# Old Testament Sacrifices



Following is a brief description of five types of sacrifices in the Old Testament. This will help us better understand the offerings made in conjunction with the seven feasts of Israel and how the feasts foreshadow the work of Christ.

## **Burnt offering ('olah)**

The ordinary translation in modern versions of the Hebrew "olah" . This term does not mean literally "burnt offering," but "what is brought up" or presented to God.

An offering completely burned to ashes. It was used to worship God, seek His favor, ask forgiveness from sin, or avert judgment. The object to be sacrificed was an unblemished male bull, ox, sheep or goat; the poor could offer a dove or pigeon.

**God's portion:** the entire animal.

**The priest's portion:** nothing.

**The offerer's portion:** nothing.

"an offering made by fire unto the Lord" (Lev. i. 9 et seq.). A synonym is, which defines the offering as complete; i.e., when it is placed upon the altar, to distinguish it from the other forms of animal sacrifice (see I Sam. vii. 9; compare Ps. li. 21). The burnt offering was the highest order of sacrifice in the Old Testament ritual. The bloodless offerings were made only in connection with it.

Every morning the ashes were conveyed by the priest to a clean place outside the camp (Ex. 39. 38-42; Lev. 1., 6. 8-13, 9. 12-14; Num. 15.).

## **Sin offering (hatta't)**

Also known as the purification offering. This was the most important Old Testament sacrifice for cleansing from sin and impurities. It made amends for specific unintentional sins and provided purification from certain forms of ceremonial uncleanness.

The object offered was a young bull for the high priest and the entire nation; a male goat for a tribal leader; a female goat or lamb for commoners; two doves or pigeons for the poor; two pounds of fine flour for the very poor; two goats and a ram on the Day of Atonement (one goat carried the sins of the nation into the wilderness).

**God's portion:** the fat covering the innards, the kidneys, liver, and caul (the fold of membrane loaded with fat that covers the intestines in mammals).

**The priest's portion:** all the remainder, which had to be eaten within the court of the tabernacle.

**The offerer's portion:** nothing.

Scriptures: Lev. 4:1-5, 13; 6:24-30; 8:14-17; 16:3-22.

## **Trespass / guilt offering ('asham)**

An offering to make up for cheating the Lord or unintentionally destroying something that belonged to Him; also to pay restitution to a person who had been robbed or cheated, payable at 6/5ths in advance. The object sacrificed was a ram without blemish.

**God's portion:** the fat covering the innards, the kidneys, liver, and caul.

**The priest's portion:** all the remainder, which had to be eaten within the court of the tabernacle.

**The offerer's portion:** nothing.

Scriptures: Lev. 5:14 – 6:7; 7:1-6.

### **Peace / fellowship offering (shelamin)**

An animal offering was given to maintain and strengthen a person's relationship with God and with other believers. It was not required as a remedy for impurity or sin but was an expression of thanksgiving for various blessings.

An important function of this sacrifice was to provide meat for the priests and the participants in the sacrifice. **Peace offerings were the only offerings the worshiper ate. In fact, they constituted a communion meal in which, symbolically, everyone ate together: God, priest, worshiper, and other believers.** There were three types of peace offerings:

- † **Thank offering (*towda*)**, given for an unexpected blessing or deliverance already granted by God. The object sacrificed was an unblemished male or female ox, sheep or goat. God's portion: the fatty portions of the animal. The priest's portion: for the wave offering, the breast was given to the high priest; for the heave offering, the right foreleg was given to the officiating priest. The offerer's portion: the remainder of the animal, to be eaten in the court the same day as a community meal with others. Scripture: Lev. 7:12-15.
- † **Votive offering (*neder*)**, given for blessing or deliverance already granted, when a vow had been made in support of the prayer for blessing or deliverance. The object sacrificed was an unblemished male or female ox, sheep or goat.  
**God's portion:** the fatty portions of the animal.

**The priest's portion:** for the wave offering, the breast was given to the high priest; for the heave offering, the right foreleg was given to the officiating priest.

**The offerer's portion:** the remainder of the animal, to be eaten in the court the same day or the next day as a community meal with others. Scripture: Lev. 7:16.

† **Freewill offering** (nedabah), given to express general thankfulness and love toward God, without regard for specific blessings. The object sacrificed was a male or female ox, sheep, or goat, and minor imperfections were permitted.

**God's portion:** the fatty portions of the animal.

**The priest's portion:** for the wave offering, the breast was given to the high priest; for the heave offering, the right foreleg was given to the officiating priest.

**The offerer's portion:** the remainder of the animal, to be eaten in the court the same day or the next day as a community meal with others. Scripture: Lev. 7:16.

## **Grain and drink offerings**

These offerings often were given with burnt offerings and peace offerings, and sometimes given by themselves, to worship God by giving thanks and to recognize God as the giver of all blessings.

The object sacrificed was a mixture of fine wheat flour, olive oil and incense; bread baked without yeast or honey in loaves or wafers or fried in flat wafers; sometimes salt was added. Scriptures: Lev. 2; 6:14-23