The annual feasts of Israel offer great insights into the Jewish roots of the Christian faith as they unfold God’s plan of redemption throughout the ages. Leviticus 23 lists these seven feasts in the order of their seasonal observance: Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Weeks, Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Booths.

Each holiday has
• a seasonal aspect
• a memorial aspect celebrating God’s faithfulness to the Jewish people
• a prophetic aspect

Passover
Passover, in Hebrew, Pesach (pronounced Pay-sakh), is the first and probably best known feast. It comes in the spring, in the Jewish month of Nisan, also called Aviv. Passover commemorates the redemption of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. Even today, Jewish people have a celebratory meal and liturgy called a Seder (pronounced Say-dur) remembering how the blood of the Passover lamb was sprinkled on the crosspiece and sideposts of the door so that the “Angel of Death” would pass over. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God. His sacrifice can set us free from the sin that holds us captive (John 1:29). The meal that many know as the Last Supper was actually a Passover celebration. Jesus used the holiday as an occasion to picture the sacrifice He was about to make and to provide a way to remember it. To this day, followers of Jesus who take communion are hearkening back to Jesus’ words at Passover.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread
The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins the day after Passover and lasts for seven days. As it’s so closely related to Passover, the names of the two holidays are often interchanged. During Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Jewish people remove all leaven from their homes and eat unleavened bread, or matzoh. Leaven in Scripture is sometimes a symbol for sin because of the way it spreads, perpetuates itself, and puffs things up. Because of Jesus, we can be released from the self-perpetuating sin cycle.

For those who know Jesus, matzah graphically portrays His pure and sinless nature. The matzah is pierced, even as Jesus was pierced by the nails in His hands and feet and the Roman spear in His side; and it is striped in the baking process, reminding us that Isaiah said, “He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities . . . and with his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

The Feast of Firstfruits
The Feast of Firstfruits, in Hebrew, Hag HaBikkurim (Hag pronounced with a ch sound as in Bach: Chag ha-bik-kur-reem), is celebrated the day after the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In Bible times, it was a feast of thanksgiving for the barley harvest, the first grain of the season. The first harvest is viewed as a promise of the larger harvest to come. It is significant that Jesus rose from the dead on this holiday. Just as the barley harvest was the promise of more to come, He is our firstfruits, the promise of resurrection and eternal life for those who trust Him (1 Corinthians 15:20).

The Feast of Weeks
The Feast of Weeks, in Hebrew, Shavuot (pronounced Shah-voo-oat), is also known by the Greek word Pentecost because it comes 50 days after the Passover Sabbath. Shavuot was also a harvest festival to thank God for the wheat harvest. According to Jewish tradition, it is also the day that Moses received the law on Mount Sinai. The first Shavuot/Pentecost after the death and resurrection of Jesus is regarded

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by Christians as the birthday of the church. In Bible
times, the priests offered two loaves of bread made
from newly harvested grain. For believers, this can
symbolize God’s people, both Jews and Gentiles,
made one in the Messiah, Jesus.

The long gap before the next feast might be seen
as our present age, waiting for the return of our
Redeemer, Messiah Jesus.

The Feast of Trumpets

The Feast of Trumpets, in Hebrew, Yom Teruah
(pronounced Yome Teh-roo-ah), comes in
autumn, on Tishrei, the seventh month of
the Jewish calendar. Today, it is commonly
called Rosh Hashanah, and is known
as the Jewish New Year, marking
the beginning of the civil year. God
commanded the blowing of trumpets
on this day to call the congregation
of Israel together for a very solemn
assembly. According to Jewish
teachings, Rosh Hashanah is the
beginning of 10 days of judgment
when the righteous are written
into the Book of Life, the wicked
are condemned, and those who
are not wholly righteous or wholly
wicked are given 10 days to repent
and thus escape judgment. We who
are written in the Lamb’s Book of
Life do not fear judgment, but
draw near to God with confidence
(Hebrews 4:14–16).

The Day of
Atonement

The Day of Atonement, in Hebrew,
Yom Kippur (Yome kee-poor), is the most
solemn day of the Jewish year. It was the only
time in Bible days when a person, specifically
the high priest, could enter the Holy of Holies.
An elaborate ritual that required ceremonial
purification (special washing and clothing), as
well as sacrifices made according to very detailed
prescriptions, made it possible for the priest to ask
forgiveness, first for his own sin, and then for the
sins of the people. But there is no longer a Temple
and therefore, no animal sacrifices. Yom Kippur has
become a time of fasting and prayer. People hope
that repentance will suffice for forgiveness of sins, but they
have no assurance that God has heard and forgiven
them, for the Scriptures teach in Leviticus 17:11 that
atonement is in the blood. When Messiah offered His
own blood as our atonement, or covering, the veil of
the Temple was torn in two, signifying that He had
opened the way into the Holy of Holies.

The Feast of Tabernacles

The Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths) is the seventh
and final annual feast. In Hebrew, it is Sukkot
(Soo-kote). In Bible days, this was the final fall harvest
festival, a time of ingathering at Jerusalem. The
Jewish people built booth-like structures and lived in
them during this feast as a reminder of the temporary
dwellings that were a way of life for our ancestors
during the 40 years of wilderness wanderings. Today,
many Jewish people still build open-roofed, three-
sided huts and decorate them with tree boughs
and autumn fruits for this festival.

Everyone in Israel who was able, came
up to Jerusalem for this harvest festival
every year. The Temple worship for
the holiday included the ritual pouring
of water from the pool of Siloam,
symbolic of the prayers for the winter
rains. It was at this time that Jesus cried
out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me
and drink” (John 7:37).

John wrote in Revelation 21:3: “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.”

The Sabbath

There is one more holy time, but it is
weekly, not annually. The Sabbath,
which falls every seventh day, was
to be a “sign” to Israel “that you may
know that I, the LOR D, sanctifies you”
(Exodus 31:13). This national day of rest
reminds the Jewish people that God rested after
creation (Exodus 20:11), and rest is therefore
holy. Also the exodus enabled Israel to enjoy rest
following generations of slavery (Deuteronomy 5:15).

As believers in Jesus, we look forward to eternal
“rest.” We will no longer struggle with sin, but
in God’s presence, we will find never-ending
refreshment and joy. The future fulfillment of the
Sabbath, like the future fulfillment of the Feast of
Tabernacles, will transform the remembrance of what
God has done into the fullness of His promises, kept
perfectly throughout eternity.

To see more articles on these feasts, go to
www.jewsforjesus.org/judaica
# The Feasts of Israel

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<td>All believers in Messiah cleansed from sin and empowered to walk in newness of life</td>
<td>Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump. . . . For [Messiah], our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. (1 Corinthians 5:7)</td>
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<td>[God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)</td>
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<td><strong>(Pentecost)</strong></td>
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<td>God’s law written on the hearts of the redeemed</td>
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<td>The assembly of all believers, dead and alive, in the heavens with Messiah</td>
<td>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. . . . Then we . . . will be caught up together . . . to meet the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17; see also 1 Corinthians 15:52)</td>
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<td>So Messiah, having been offered once to bear the sins of many. (Hebrews 9:28)</td>
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<td>Israel will repent and look to her Messiah in one day</td>
<td>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. . . . On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and . . . Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness. (Zechariah 12:10; 13:1)</td>
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<td>Final harvest The third of three pilgrimage festivals held in Jerusalem</td>
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<td>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. (Zechariah 14:16)</td>
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<td>Shabbat Sabbath</td>
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<td>A sign of God’s covenant and a day of rest from labor</td>
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