

Festivals and Holy Days

In the Mosaic Law God gave the Israelites a calendar that was filled with festivals and holy days. The holy day that we are most familiar with is the Sabbath, but there are quite a few others as well. I think it's unfortunate that so many Christians are unfamiliar with most of these festivals. These holy days are not just trivia: they point to Christ's ministry *and* have prophetic significance.

We can find a detailed list of these festivals in Leviticus 23:

Leviticus 23:1: "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,
2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts."

The chapter goes on to list the various festivals. They are:

- **The Sabbath (1 day):** this occurred on the seventh day of each week; it was a holy day of rest (Lev. 23:1-3). This is the holy day that we are most familiar with.
- **The Passover (1 day):** this occurred on the fourteenth day of the first month of the Jewish year. It was to remind Israel that God delivered them from bondage in Egypt (Lev. 23:4-5).
- **The Feast of Unleavened Bread (7 days):** this was a week-long event that started on the day after the Passover. This was to remind God's people of their deliverance from bondage into a new, holy life (Lev. 23:6-8).
- **The Firstfruits (1 day):** this occurred on the day after the Sabbath that followed the Passover (which meant it always took place on a Sunday). It was a demonstration that the first and best of everything belonged to God (Lev. 23:9-14). This began the day after the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
- **The Pentecost (Feast of Weeks) (1 day):** this occurred seven weeks (50 days) after the Festival of Firstfruits. In this holy day a priest would wave two loaves (which had been baked with leaven) before the Lord. (Lev. 23:15-21).
- **The Trumpets (1 day):** this occurred on the first day of the seventh month. This was a day of rest and burnt offerings, and it symbolized new beginnings (Lev. 23:23-25). A gap of 4 months separated Pentecost from Trumpets.
- **The Day of Atonement (1 day):** this occurred on the tenth day of the seventh month. This was a day of rest, in which people cried out to the Lord for forgiveness (Lev. 23:28-32). This is the day when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies and made atonement for the sins of the people.
- **The Feast of Tabernacles (Feast of Booths) (7 days):** this was a week-long event that began on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. This reminded Israel of the ways God had blessed them in the past (Lev. 33-44).

These festivals give us an amazing overview of God's plan for history. Some people have called these festivals God's prophetic calendar.

Before we begin a detailed look at each holy day, however, there is an important question that

we need to answer. When the Church Age began there were some people who wondered if Christians were still bound by the old levitical law. Was the Church supposed to keep all of these festivals?

That question was answered by the apostle Paul in two different places:

Colossians 2:16: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:
17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."

Romans 14:5: "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.
6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks."

The lesson in these verses is clear. In the Old Testament the Israelites were under the Mosaic Law, and therefore they were required to observe these feasts (along with all of the other provisions that were contained within the law). After the death of Jesus, however, the Old Testament was supplanted by the New Testament. We are no longer under the Mosaic Law; instead we are under grace. Christians are not required to observe these festivals. Instead we have the freedom to do as we think best; we can observe them or we can ignore them. The Bible commands Christians to not judge each other concerning this matter. Those who keep them are not better than those who don't (and vice versa).

There is not enough time to explore each of the feasts in detail, so I will only cover them briefly. I hope this will give you a better understanding of the marvelous calendar that God gave to the Israelites.

The Sabbath

The first holy day that is mentioned in Leviticus 23 is the Sabbath. It was to be held on the seventh day of every week:

Leviticus 23:3: "Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, a holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings."

The Lord set apart the seventh day of the week (which is our Saturday) to be a holy day of rest. No work was allowed to be done on the Sabbath *on pain of death*. In Numbers 15:32-36 we are told that a man was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. When he was brought to the Lord for sentencing God commanded that he be stoned to death. This was done in obedience to this commandment:

Exodus 30:14: "Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people."

15 Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death."

Twice in two verses the Lord commanded that anyone who violated the Sabbath was to be put to death. The Lord did not accept violations of the Sabbath (although as Christ pointed out, showing love and kindness was not a violation), and God often used His prophets to rebuke Israel for the many ways they violated this command.

The Lord gave several reasons for this holy day. First, when the Lord created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, He made the seventh day holy:

Exodus 20:11: "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

We are also told that the seventh day of the week was set aside so that mankind might be refreshed from their labors:

Exodus 23:12: "Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed."

Finally, the Sabbath was set aside to remind the nation of Israel of their special relationship with God:

Exodus 23:13: "Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you."

Besides the Sabbath day, the Lord also appointed Sabbath years and the Year of Jubilee. Every seventh year was to be a year of rest. In that year the Israelites were not allowed to sow crops; instead the land was to lie dormant in order to give it a chance to rest. The Lord promised to provide an abundant harvest on the year before the Sabbath year so that famine would not ensue. Likewise, every fiftieth year was the Year of Jubilee; the land was also to lie rest on that year, and all debts were canceled. Since the Year of Jubilee always followed a Sabbath year, the Lord promised to provide an abundant harvest before these two years of rest.

The Sabbath is one of the festivals that have not yet been fulfilled. We know this because the book of Hebrews expounds upon it:

Hebrews 4:4: "For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works.

5 And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest.

6 Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief:

7 Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

8 For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.

9 There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

10 For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.

11 Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.”

For now, in this life, we labor and work for God. A day is coming, though, when we will finally cease from our labors and enter into God's rest. The people of God have struggled for a long time, but one day Christ will return for us. When that day comes the Church will finally rest from its labors. Our Sabbath day of rest is approaching; every day it draws nearer.

As a side-note, it's worth noting that God clearly states that He created the world in *six days*. The word that is translated “day” in Exodus 20 is exact the same word that is used in Genesis 1. God could not have made it any plainer that everything was created in six ordinary days – after all, the Lord commanded the Israelites to rest on the seventh day just as He did! Those who would claim that the days lasted millions of years turn Exodus 20:11 into nonsense. Are people supposed to work for untold millions of years and then rest for millions of years? If God had wanted to say that the world came into being through millions of years of evolution He certainly could have done so – but He did not.

The Passover

The second holy day that is on the calendar is the Passover. It was to be celebrated on the fourteenth day of the first month of the Jewish year:

Leviticus 23:5: “In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the Lord's passover.”

The festival began in the evening. Jewish days always began in the evening and then continued until the next afternoon. This followed the pattern that God established in Genesis 1: a day consisted of an evening and a morning.

The first time that Israel celebrated the Passover was when they were still in bondage in Egypt:

Exodus 12:2: “And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying,

2 This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.

3 Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for a house: ...

5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats:

6 And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole

assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.

7 And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it.

8 And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.

9 Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance [internal organs] thereof.

10 And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire.”

The Passover was to be celebrated at the beginning of every Jewish year, and it served as a reminder of Israel's great deliverance from Egypt. The last plague that God sent to Egypt was the angel of death, who was sent to kill the firstborn of every living creature. In order to be saved from the angel of death the Jews had to be covered by the blood of a perfect lamb. All of the firstborn who were not protected by the blood were killed by the death angel. This is a striking parallel to Christ, who was called “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The Lord is even called “Christ our passover” in 1 Corinthians 5:7, which makes the parallel even clearer.

The Jews celebrated the first passover by killing the perfect male lamb in the evening. After they painted the doorposts of their house with blood, they were to roast the lamb (with its internal organs) with fire, and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Nothing was allowed to remain until the next morning; if there were any leftovers they had to be burned.

The Passover looked forward to the coming Lamb of God – the Messiah who would die for our sins. As you might suspect, Jesus was actually crucified *on the day of the Passover*. The Passover festival was fulfilled by Jesus Christ when He died on the cross; He fulfilled it by personally becoming the sacrificial Lamb.

The blood of Christ is the only thing that can deliver us from death. We must be washed in His blood:

John 6:53: “Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.

54 Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise Him up at the last day.

55 For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.

56 He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in Him.

57 As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so He that eateth me, even He shall live by me.

58 This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live forever.”

No outsiders were allowed to eat of the Passover; only those who were born into the family (or purchased) could eat it. Likewise, no one who is not in the family of God can partake of Christ.

I think this quote puts it well:

“The firstborn Jews in Egypt weren't saved from death by admiring the lamb, caring for the lamb, or loving the lamb. The lamb had to be slain, and the blood applied to the doorpost of each Jewish house. We aren't saved by Christ the Example or Christ

the Teacher. We're saved by Christ the Substitute, who gave His life in our stead on the cross at the same hour the Passover lambs were being slain at the Jewish temple in Jerusalem." (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Holy*, pg. 103-104)

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a seven-day event that began the day after Passover. It is explained in this passage:

Leviticus 23:6-8: "And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the Lord: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread.

7 In the first day ye shall have a holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.

8 But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord seven days: in the seventh day is a holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein."

This was celebrated when the Israelites were still in Egypt:

Exodus 12:15: "Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel.

16 And in the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you.

17 And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance forever.

18 In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even.

19 Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land.

20 Ye shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations shall ye eat unleavened bread."

The feast could be summed up as follows:

- The feast lasted 7 days, during which they were to eat unleavened bread each day.
- The first and last day of the feast were holy days, and no work could be done on them.
- The Israelites were to completely remove all leaven (which was symbolic of sin) from their homes.
- No one could eat anything with leaven in it during the feast. The punishment for breaking this was severe.

- “Offerings made by fire” were to be made during those seven days.
- The Israelites were to observe it as a reminder of the day the Lord delivered them from Egypt.

There are two important points that we need to understand in order to make sense of this feast. First of all, leaven is symbolic of sin. Second, Jesus referred to Himself as the Bread of Life:

John 6:33: "For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world."

John 6:50: "This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.

51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Since Jesus was without sin, and since Jesus is the Bread of Life, that makes Him *unleavened bread*. In this festival God commanded Israel to partake of unleavened bread – and Jesus commands us to partake of Him. This festival began the day after after the Passover, which means it took place the day after the lamb had been sacrificed. Just as Christ fulfilled the Passover by becoming the sacrificial lamb, Christ fulfilled this festival by *being* the unleavened bread. God commands us to partake of Him and remove the sin (which is what leaven is symbolic of) from our lives.

This is how the apostle Paul put it:

1 Corinthians 5:6: "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?

7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:

8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

The Festival of Firstfruits

The Festival of the Firstfruits fell on the day after the Sabbath that followed the Passover. Since the Sabbath fell on a Saturday, that meant that this festival would always occur on a Sunday. The festival is described in this passage:

Leviticus 23:9: "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

10 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest:

11 And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.

12 And ye shall offer that day when ye wave the sheaf an he lamb without blemish

of the first year for a burnt offering unto the Lord.

13 And the meat offering thereof shall be two tenth deals of fine flour mingled with oil, an offering made by fire unto the Lord for a sweet savor: and the drink offering thereof shall be of wine, the fourth part of a hin.

14 And ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until the selfsame day that ye have brought an offering unto your God: it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.”

In this festival the Jews were to bring a portion of the firstfruits of their crops to the Lord as an offering. The priest would take this portion and wave it before the Lord. They would then offer a male lamb, without blemish, as a burnt offering. The offering was also to be accompanied by a meat offering and a drink offering. (Note that these offerings were offerings of *dedication*, not offerings for sin.)

The Israelites were not allowed to eat “bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears” until they brought the firstfruits and offered it to the Lord. The Lord claimed the firstfruits of their crops as His own, and this was day they were required to offer it. Although the entire creation belongs to God, the Lord only required the firstfruits and left the rest to the nation of Israel. The firstfruits were offered on behalf of the entire harvest.

The key to understanding this festival is to realize that Christ rose from the dead on the very day that this festival was being celebrated. That was not a coincidence. The Bible identifies Christ as the **firstfruit of the dead**:

1 Corinthians 15:20: “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming.”

This festival looked forward to the resurrection. Although there were other people in the Bible who were raised from the dead, they were not raised incorruptible and immortal and they eventually died again. Christ's resurrection, however, was different: He was raised in a new and more glorious body. Since Jesus was the first person to be resurrected, He was the firstfruits. So far He is the only person who has been resurrected, but one day the rest of the harvest will follow. Verse 23 tells us that when Christ returns the righteous dead will be resurrected and the living will be translated.

Christ fulfilled the Passover by becoming the sacrificial lamb, and He fulfilled the Festival of Unleavened Bread by becoming the Bread of Life. Christ fulfilled this festival by raising from the dead and becoming the firstfruits of the dead.

Pentecost

The festival of Pentecost (which was also known as the Feast of Weeks) was a one-day holy day that took place 50 days after the Festival of Firstfruits. It is described in these verses:

Leviticus 23:15: “And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath,

from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete:

16 Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the Lord.

17 Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the Lord.

18 And ye shall offer with the bread seven lambs without blemish of the first year, and one young bullock, and two rams: they shall be for a burnt offering unto the Lord, with their meat offering, and their drink offerings, even an offering made by fire, of sweet savor unto the Lord.

19 Then ye shall sacrifice one kid of the goats for a sin offering, and two lambs of the first year for a sacrifice of peace offerings.

20 And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits for a wave offering before the Lord, with the two lambs: they shall be holy to the Lord for the priest.

21 And ye shall proclaim on the selfsame day, that it may be a holy convocation unto you: ye shall do no servile work therein: it shall be a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations."

As the passage explains, the festival of Pentecost took place fifty days after the festival of firstfruits. It was a one-day event, and no work could be done on the day of Pentecost. The event involved a number of different sacrifices:

- A series of burnt offerings that consisted of seven lambs, one young bullock, and two rams. Burnt offerings were offerings of dedication.
- A goat as a sin offering. Sin offerings were offerings of reconciliation for sin against God.
- Two lambs for peace offerings. Peace offerings dealt with thanksgiving and fellowship with God.

At the heart of this festival were the two wave loaves. These loaves were made of fine flour and were baked with yeast. This is very unusual, as the other festivals (such as Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread) forbade the use of yeast. In the Scriptures yeast always represents sin, and yet yeast was baked into these two loaves. The priest was to take these two loaves and wave them before the Lord.

The reason we are so familiar with the word Pentecost is because that is the day the Church was born:

Acts 2:1: "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

On that day the Holy Spirit came and united the Jews and the Gentiles (two very different groups) into one body. There was no longer Jew or Gentile, for all were one in Christ. The two loaves had been joined into one.

These loaves, however, have not yet been made perfect. Just as there was leaven in the loaves, so there is sin in the Church. When the Lord returns He will make us immortal and incorruptible, but that day has not yet come. For now we still have to deal with the sin that works throughout the body.

One of the key aspects of leaven is that it makes bread rise. Leaven doesn't actually make more bread, though; it just makes the bread appear to be larger than it really is. Likewise, sin has made the Church appear much larger than it really is. There are many people in our midst who claim to be Christians but are not. These people will be separated out when the Lord returns and will be left behind.

One other thing: right after this festival is described there are two verses that seem very out of place:

Leviticus 23:22: “And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleanings of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger: I am the Lord your God.”

Why was this commandment put right in the middle of a discussion of festivals and holy days? Well, it's interesting to note that because of this commandment, Ruth was able to find food to feed herself and her mother-in-law. This led to her relationship with Boaz, who was an ancestor of King David, who was an ancestor of Jesus Christ – the one who made all of these festivals possible.

As we have seen, Christ fulfilled the Passover by becoming the sacrificial lamb. He fulfilled the Festival of Unleavened Bread by becoming the Bread of Life. He fulfilled the Festival of Firstfruits by rising from the dead. The Holy Spirit fulfilled Pentecost by joining both Jew and Gentile into the body of Christ. All of these festivals take place in the spring, and all of them have been fulfilled.

There are still three festivals left. All of them occur in the fall, and all of them remain unfulfilled. They are prophetic, and look forward to events that have not yet occurred.

The Festival of Trumpets

After Pentecost there is a gap of four months before the next festival – but the three remaining festivals all occur within 15 days. The next holy day is the Festival of Trumpets, which was held on the first day of the seventh month. It is described in this passage:

Leviticus 23:23: “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,
24 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation.
25 Ye shall do no servile work therein: but ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord.”

This was a one-day festival, and no work was allowed on that day. It was a day of rest and sacrifices – a day that was signified by the blowing of trumpets.

The sacrifices for this festival are described in this passage:

Numbers 29:1: “And in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, ye shall have a holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work: it is a day of blowing the trumpets unto you.

2 And ye shall offer a burnt offering for a sweet savor unto the Lord; one young bullock, one ram, and seven lambs of the first year without blemish:

3 And their meat offering shall be of flour mingled with oil, three tenth deals for a bullock, and two tenth deals for a ram,

4 And one tenth deal for one lamb, throughout the seven lambs:

5 And one kid of the goats for a sin offering, to make an atonement for you:”

As was mentioned before, burnt offerings and meat offerings were offerings of dedication and *commitment*, not offerings for sin. They were a way of saying “I am fully dedicating my life to serving God.”

It is very important to note that this day was signified by blowing trumpets. There were three times when priests were allowed to blow trumpets, and they are listed in Numbers 10:1-10. Priests could blow their trumpets to call the people together, to announce war, or to announce special times (such as the new moon). This festival falls into the third category.

The Festival of Trumpets was held on the first day of the seventh month, and it ushered in the new civil year (“Rosh Hashanah”). Since it started the new civil year, it marked a new beginning for the Israelites. As Christians we are also waiting for a new beginning, which will be marked by the blowing of a trumpet:

1 Corinthians 15:51: “Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54 So when this corruption shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.”

As we can see, the fulfillment of this festival is still in the future. One day the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised, and we will begin a new existence. This festival looks forward to the Rapture, and one day Christ will fulfill it by returning for us.

There are some people who have speculated that since the other festivals were fulfilled on the day of that festival, the Festival of Trumpets will likewise be fulfilled on Rosh Hashanah. Unfortunately, the Scriptures do not support this. The reason this festival takes place on the first day of the Jewish civil year is to commemorate the fact that a new year has begun; it is not pointing to a specific date in history. The Rapture can occur on any day and at any time; it is not limited to occurring on just one day of the year. Whenever it happens it will mark the beginning of a new life for us – just as

Rosh Hashanah marked the beginning of a new civil year for Israel.

The Day of Atonement

This feast was a one-day event that occurred on the tenth day of the seventh month (which is nine days after the Festival of Trumpets). It is explained in this passage:

Leviticus 23:27: “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.

28 And ye shall do no work in that same day: for it is a day of atonement, to make an atonement for you before the Lord your God.

29 For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people.

30 And whatsoever soul it be that doeth any work in that same day, the same soul will I destroy from among his people.

31 Ye shall do no manner of work: it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

32 It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath.”

The day of atonement is a day that is set aside for fasting, praying, and confessing the sin of the people. On that day the congregation was to do no work; their entire focus was to be on “afflicting your souls” and crying out to God for forgiveness. No work was allowed on that day (perhaps because one's works cannot bring atonement). On this day the High Priest entered into the Holy of Holies in the Temple and sprinkled blood on the mercy seat, to make atonement for the sins of the people.

I believe that this festival has yet to be fulfilled, and that it speaks of the day when the Jews will finally accept Jesus as their Messiah. This is spoken of in the book of Zechariah:

Zechariah 12:10: “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

11 In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the valley of Megiddon.”

At the end of the Tribulation the Jews will realize that they have rejected their Messiah and will turn to God with great sorrow and repentance. At that point all Israel will be saved (which is what Paul prophesied in Romans 11).

The Feast of Tabernacles

This feast, also known as the “Feast of Booths”, occurred on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (which is five days after the Day of Atonement). This festival was a week-long event that dealt not with affliction but with joy:

Leviticus 23:34: “Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the Lord.

35 On the first day shall be a holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.

36 Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord: on the eighth day shall be a holy convocation unto you; and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord: it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein. ...

39 Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath.

40 And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days.

41 And ye shall keep it a feast unto the Lord seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month.

42 Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths:

43 That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”

In this feast the Israelites were to take branches from trees, build booths (or tents), and live in them for seven days. The first and last of these days were considered Sabbaths. (In the Jewish calendar there were occasionally times when a day was designated as a “Sabbath”, even though it was not actually the seventh day of the week.) During this time the Israelites were to dwell in the booths, rejoice in the Lord, and remember the time when their ancestors dwelt in tents after the Lord delivered them from Egypt. While the focus of the Day of Atonement was on mourning and repentance, the focus of the Feast of Tabernacles was on rejoicing in the goodness of the Lord. This holy day was something like our Thanksgiving, only it lasted for an entire week.

There were a great many sacrifices involved with this festival; a list can be found in Numbers 29. By the time the week was over 199 animals were sacrificed.

What I find especially interesting is that during the Millennial Kingdom the surviving Gentile nations will be required to go to Jerusalem and keep this festival:

Zechariah 14:16: “And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.

17 And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain.”

Even during the Millennium the Lord still wants people to look back and remember the great things that God has done.

According to my research, scholars believe that this festival looks forward to the time when Jesus will return and live with His people once again, and reign over the world. The Bible tells us that it will be a time of great peace and great rejoicing. When prophesying about the coming Millennium, the prophet Isaiah wrote this:

Isaiah 65:18: “But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.

19 And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.”

People will indeed rejoice before the Lord – not for seven days, but for a thousand years.

As you can see, there are some festivals that have been fulfilled and there are some that have not. The Passover was fulfilled when Jesus became our sacrificial Lamb and died on the cross. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was fulfilled when Jesus led a sinless life and became the Bread of Life for us. The Festival of Firstfruits was fulfilled when Jesus rose from the dead and became the firstfruits of the resurrection. Pentecost was fulfilled when the Holy Spirit came and united the Jews and the Gentiles into one body, the Church.

There remain four unfulfilled festivals. We have not yet entered into our Sabbath rest. Jesus has not yet returned for us at the sound of the trumpet. The Jews have not yet repented of rejecting the Messiah and mourned for their sins. Finally, the age of the Millennial Kingdom has not yet come. The Festival of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Festival of Booths are still in the future – but one day they will be fulfilled. One might say that they are the next events on God's calendar.