

God's Prophetic Calendar

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. We can find a detailed list of these festivals in Leviticus 23. These festivals give us an amazing overview of God's plan for history. Some people have called these festivals God's prophetic calendar.

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. 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.

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. 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.

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.”

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 6:50: “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. 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 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.

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 Numbers 29:1. The Israelites were to offer a burnt offering, a meat offering, and a sin offering. 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. I believe that 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). 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 “afflict their souls” and 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.

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.