

The Feasts/Festivals of the Jews

Three Major Feasts/Festivals

1. The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread

In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight – The Passover (Leviticus 23:5)
on the fifteenth day of the same month...for seven days – Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:6)

Purpose – to celebrate God's passing over the homes of the Israelites when He killed the firstborn of all Egyptian families and to celebrate the Israelites' leaving Egypt quickly after the night of death in Egypt and for God's freeing them from slavery in Egypt

2. The Feast of Weeks or Harvest, i.e., Pentecost

When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest ... then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest (Leviticus 23:10)
 15 'You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the [Passover] sabbath, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete sabbaths.
 16 'You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh sabbath (Leviticus 23:15-16)

Purpose – to celebrate God's provision of crops and food to the Israelites on the land of Israel

3. The Feast of Booths/Tabernacles/Tents/Huts and Ingathering

On the fifteenth of this seventh month...for seven days (Leviticus 23:34)
at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labors from the field (Exodus 23:16)

Purpose – to celebrate God's provision of food on the land and God's provision for the Israelites during the forty years of their journey from Egypt to the land of Israel while they lived in temporary dwellings

Other Important Feasts

4. The Sabbath Day

For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest (Leviticus 23:2)

Purpose – a day of complete rest

5. The Feast of Trumpets

In the seventh month on the first of the month (Leviticus 23:24)

Purpose – a reminder of God near the end of the harvesting season

6. The Day of Atonement

On exactly the tenth day of this seventh month (Leviticus 23:27)

Purpose – to humble themselves and seek forgiveness from God

Another feast instituted by the Jews but not by God

7. The Feast of Dedication or Hanukkah

Purpose – to celebrate the rededication of the temple on December 25, 165 B.C. after Antiochus Epiphanes IV had desecrated it three years earlier

Leviticus 23 has the most comprehensive list of the feasts

Leviticus 23:1 The LORD spoke again to Moses, saying, 2 “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘The LORD’S appointed times which you shall proclaim as **holy convocations** — My appointed times are these:

3 ‘For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a **holy convocation**. You shall not do any work; it is a **sabbath** to the LORD in all your dwellings.

4 ‘These are the appointed times of the LORD, **holy convocations** which you shall proclaim at the times appointed for them. 5 ‘In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the LORD’S Passover. 6 ‘Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. 7 ‘On the first day you shall have a **holy convocation**; you shall not do any laborious work. 8 ‘But for seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD. On the seventh day is a **holy convocation**; you shall not do any laborious work.’”

9 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 10 “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. 11 ‘He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD for you to be accepted; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it. 12 ‘Now on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb one year old without defect for a burnt offering to the LORD. 13 ‘Its grain offering shall then be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering by fire to the LORD for a soothing aroma, with its drink offering, a fourth of a hin of wine. 14 ‘Until this same day, until you have brought in the offering of your God, you shall eat neither bread nor roasted grain nor new growth. It is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places.

15 ‘You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the sabbath, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete sabbaths. 16 ‘You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh sabbath; then you shall present a new grain offering to the LORD. 17 ‘You shall bring in from your dwelling places two loaves of bread for a wave offering, made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of a fine flour, baked with leaven as first fruits to the LORD. 18 ‘Along with the bread you shall present seven one year old male lambs without defect, and a bull of the herd and two rams; they are to be a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD. 19 ‘You shall also offer one male goat for a sin offering and two male lambs one year old for a sacrifice of peace offerings. 20 ‘The priest shall then wave them with the bread of the **first fruits** for a wave offering with two lambs before the LORD; they are to be holy to the LORD for the priest. 21 ‘On this same day you shall make a proclamation as well; you are to have a **holy convocation**. You shall do no laborious work. It is to be a perpetual statute in all your dwelling places throughout your generations.

22 ‘When you reap the harvest of your land, moreover, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field nor gather the gleaning of your harvest; you are to leave them for the needy and the alien. I am the LORD your God.’”

23 Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 24 “Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘In the seventh month on the first of the month you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. 25 ‘You shall not do any laborious work, but you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD.’”

26 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 27 “On exactly the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a **holy convocation** for you, and you shall humble your souls and present an offering by fire to the LORD. 28 “You shall not do any work on this same day, for it is a **day of**

atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the LORD your God. 29 “If there is any person who will not humble himself on this same day, he shall be cut off from his people. 30 “As for any person who does any work on this same day, that person I will destroy from among his people. 31 “You shall do no work at all. It is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places. 32 “It is to be a sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall humble your souls; on the ninth of the month at evening, from evening until evening you shall keep your sabbath.”

33 Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 34 “Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘On the fifteenth of this seventh month is the **Feast of Booths** for seven days to the LORD. 35 ‘On the first day is a **holy convocation**; you shall do no laborious work of any kind. 36 ‘For seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a **holy convocation** and present an offering by fire to the LORD; it is an assembly. You shall do no laborious work.

37 ‘These are the appointed times of the LORD which you shall proclaim as **holy convocations**, to present offerings by fire to the LORD — burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each day’s matter on its own day — 38 besides those of the sabbaths of the LORD, and besides your gifts and besides all your votive and freewill offerings, which you give to the LORD.

39 ‘On exactly the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the crops of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD for seven days, with a rest on the first day and a rest on the eighth day. 40 ‘Now on the first day you shall *take for yourselves the foliage of beautiful trees, palm branches and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook*, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. 41 ‘You shall thus celebrate it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. 42 ‘You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths, 43 so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.” 44 So Moses declared to the sons of Israel the appointed times of the LORD.

Other passages that list or refer to the three major feasts/festivals

Exodus 23:14 “Three times a year you shall celebrate a feast to Me. 15 “You shall observe the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**; for seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. And none shall appear before Me empty-handed. 16 “Also you shall observe the **Feast of the Harvest of the first fruits** of your labors from what you sow in the field; also the **Feast of the Ingathering** at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labors from the field. 17 “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord ¹GOD.

Exodus 34:21 “You shall work six days, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during plowing time and harvest you shall rest. 22 “You shall celebrate the **Feast of Weeks**, that is, **the first fruits of the wheat harvest**, and the **Feast of Ingathering** at the turn of the year. 23 “^aThree times a year all your males are to appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel. 24 “For I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your borders, and no man shall covet your land when you go up three times a year to appear before the LORD your God.”

Deuteronomy 16:1 “Observe the month of Abib and celebrate the **Passover** to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night. 2 “You shall sacrifice the **Passover** to the LORD your God from the flock and the herd, in the place where the LORD chooses to establish His name. 3 “You shall not eat leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat with it

unleavened bread, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), so that you may remember all the days of your life the day when you came out of the land of Egypt. 4 “For seven days no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory, and none of the flesh which you sacrifice on the evening of the first day shall remain overnight until morning. 5 “You are not allowed to sacrifice the **Passover** in any of your towns which the LORD your God is giving you; 6 but at the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name, you shall sacrifice the **Passover** in the evening at sunset, at the time that you came out of Egypt. 7 “You shall cook and eat it in the place which the LORD your God chooses. In the morning you are to return to your tents. 8 “Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a solemn assembly to the LORD your God; you shall do no work on it.

9 “You shall count seven weeks for yourself; you shall begin to count seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain. 10 “Then you shall celebrate the **Feast of Weeks** to the LORD your God with a tribute of a freewill offering of your hand, which you shall give just as the LORD your God blesses you; 11 and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite who is in your town, and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst, in the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name. 12 “You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.

13 “You shall celebrate the **Feast of Booths** seven days after you have gathered in from your threshing floor and your wine vat; 14 and you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your towns. 15 “Seven days you shall celebrate a feast to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful.

16 “Three times in a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, at the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** and at the **Feast of Weeks** and at the **Feast of Booths**, and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed. 17 “Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you.

Numbers 28:16-29:6 with explicit references to Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Trumpets

Numbers 28:16 ‘Then on the fourteenth day of the first month shall be the LORD’S **Passover**. 17 ‘On the fifteenth day of this month shall be a **feast, unleavened bread** shall be eaten for seven days. 18 ‘On the first day shall be a **holy convocation**; you shall do no laborious work. 19 ‘You shall present an offering by fire, a burnt offering to the LORD: two bulls and one ram and seven male lambs one year old, having them without defect. 20 ‘For their grain offering, you shall offer fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for a bull and two-tenths for the ram. 21 ‘A tenth of an ephah you shall offer for each of the seven lambs; 22 and one male goat for a sin offering to make atonement for you. 23 ‘You shall present these besides the burnt offering of the morning, which is for a continual burnt offering. 24 ‘After this manner you shall present daily, for seven days, the food of the offering by fire, of a soothing aroma to the LORD; it shall be presented with its drink offering in addition to the continual burnt offering. 25 ‘On the seventh day you shall have a **holy convocation**; you shall do no laborious work.

26 ‘Also on the day of the first fruits, when you present a new grain offering to the LORD in your **Feast of Weeks**, you shall have a **holy convocation**; you shall do no laborious work. 27 ‘You shall offer a burnt offering for a soothing aroma to the LORD: two young bulls, one ram, seven male lambs one year old; 28 and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for each bull, two-tenths for the one ram, 29 a tenth for each of the seven lambs; 30 also one male goat to make atonement for you. 31 “Besides the continual burnt offering and its grain offering, you shall present them with their drink offerings. They shall be without defect.

29:1 ‘Now in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall also have a **holy convocation**; you shall do no laborious work. It will be to you a day for **blowing trumpets**. 2 ‘You shall offer a burnt offering as a soothing aroma to the LORD: one bull, one ram, and seven male lambs one year old without defect; 3 also their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for the bull, two-tenths for the ram, 4 and one-tenth for ¹each of the seven lambs. 5 ‘Offer one male goat for a sin offering, to make atonement for you, 6 ^abesides the burnt offering of the new moon and its grain offering, and the ^bcontinual burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offerings, according to their ordinance, for a soothing aroma, an offering by fire to the LORD.

The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread as first described in Exodus 12:1-34

Exodus 12:1 Now the LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, 2 “This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you. 3 “Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, ‘On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers’ households, a lamb for each household. 4 ‘Now if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his neighbor nearest to his house are to take one according to the number of persons in them; according to what each man should eat, you are to divide the lamb. 5 ‘Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. 6 ‘You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight. 7 ‘Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. 8 ‘They shall eat the flesh that same night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 9 ‘Do not eat any of it raw or boiled at all with water, but rather roasted with fire, both its head and its legs along with its entrails. 10 ^aAnd you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire. 11 ‘Now you shall eat it in this manner: with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste — it is the LORD’S **Passover**. 12 ‘For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments — I am the LORD. 13 ‘The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

14 ‘Now this day will be a memorial to you, and **you shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD**; throughout your generations you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance. 15 ‘Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, but on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses; for whoever eats anything leavened from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. 16 ‘On the first day you shall have a **holy assembly**, and another **holy assembly on the seventh day**; no work at all shall be done on them, except what must be eaten by every person, that alone may be prepared by you. 17 ‘You shall also observe the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt; therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a permanent ordinance. 18 ‘In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. 19 ‘Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is an alien or a native of the land. 20 ‘You shall not eat anything leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.’”

21 Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go and take for yourselves lambs according to your families, and slay the **Passover** lamb. 22 “You shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and the two doorposts; and none of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning. 23 “For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you. 24 “And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever. 25 “When you enter the land which the LORD will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite. 26 “And

when your children say to you, ‘What does this rite mean to you?’ 27 you shall say, ‘It is a **Passover** sacrifice to the LORD who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.’” And the people bowed low and worshiped.

28 Then the sons of Israel went and did so; just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

29 Now it came about at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of cattle. 30 Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians, and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was no home where there was not someone dead. 31 Then he called for Moses and Aaron at night and said, “Rise up, get out from among my people, both you and the sons of Israel; and go, worship the LORD, as you have said. 32 “Take both your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and go, and bless me also.” 33 The Egyptians urged the people, to send them out of the land in haste, for they said, “We will all be dead.” 34 So the people took their dough before it was leavened, with their kneading bowls bound up in the clothes on their shoulders.

35 Now the sons of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, for they had requested from the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold, and clothing; 36 and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

37 Now the sons of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children. 38 A mixed multitude also went up with them, along with flocks and herds, a very large number of livestock. 39 They baked the dough which they had brought out of Egypt into cakes of unleavened bread. For it had not become leavened, since they were driven out of Egypt and could not delay, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

40 Now the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. 41 And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, to the very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. 42 It is a night to be observed for the LORD for having brought them out from the land of Egypt; this night is for the LORD, to be observed by all the sons of Israel throughout their generations.

43 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “This is the ordinance of the **Passover**: no foreigner is to eat of it; 44 but every man’s slave purchased with money, after you have circumcised him, then he may eat of it. 45 “A sojourner or a hired servant shall not eat of it. 46 “It is to be eaten in a single house; you are not to bring forth any of the flesh outside of the house, nor are you to break any bone of it. 47 “All the congregation of Israel are to celebrate this. 48 “But if a stranger sojourns with you, and celebrates the **Passover** to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near to celebrate it; and he shall be like a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it. 49 “The same law shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you.”

50 Then all the sons of Israel did so; they did just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron. 51 And on that same day the LORD brought the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts.

Numbers 10:10 regarding the blowing of trumpets at the beginning of each month

Numbers 10:10 “Also in the day of your gladness and in your appointed feasts, and on the first days of your months, you shall **blow the trumpets** over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be as a reminder of you before your God. I am the LORD your God.”

Helpful comments from the Expositor’s Bible Commentary

EBC for Leviticus 23:15-21 – The wheat harvest in Israel runs from the end of April well into June depending on the location, soil, and season.

EBC for Acts 2:1 – Luke describes the miracle of the coming of the Holy Spirit, with its accompanying signs, in four short verses, remarkable for their nuances. The miracle occurred on the festival known in

Late Judaism as Pentecost (*he pentekoste*, “fiftieth”), which, according to Leviticus 23:15-16 (cf. Deut 16:9-12; Jos. Antiq. III, 252 [ix.6]; SBK, 2:597–602), was to be celebrated on the “day after the seventh Sabbath” and hence on the fiftieth day after Passover. It was originally the festival of the firstfruits of the grain harvest (Exod 23:16; Lev 23:17-22; Num 28:26-31); and it was called the Feast of Weeks because it came after a period of seven weeks of harvesting that began with the offering of the first barley sheaf during the Passover celebration and ended with the wheat harvest.

EBC for John 10:22 – The Feast of Dedication, now known as Hanukkah, was established as a memorial to the purification and rededication of the temple by Judas Maccabeus on Kislev (December) 25, 165 B.C., after its profanation three years earlier by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Antiochus, the king of Syria, had captured Jerusalem, plundered the temple treasury, and sacrificed a sow to Jupiter on the temple altar. His attempt to Hellenize Judea resulted in the Maccabean revolt, which, after three years, was successful in defeating the Syrian armies and liberating the Jewish people.