

The Feasts of Israel

An Analysis and Interpretation

the number of feasts

It is usually stated that there were seven feasts

1. **Passover** (*Pesah*, Heb).

[Ex12:1-28, 43-49; Lev 23:5; Num 28:16; Deut 16:1-8]

Time: The evening of the 14th Nisan (Abib, March-April), the first month of the sacred year (the 7th month of the civil year).

Purpose: To commemorate the deliverance from Egypt when God passed over the land and killed the firstborn but spared the Jews covered by blood.

Typology: The death of Christ who is our Passover [Jn 1:29, 19:36; 1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pt 1:18-19]

Prophetic significance: A) It is the foundation for the Lord's Supper [Matt 26:17-30; Mk 14:12-25; Lk 22:1-20]. B) It is also a foreshadowing of the marriage supper of the victorious Lamb of God [Matt 26:29; Mk 14:25; Lk 22:16-18].

2. **Unleavened Bread**, (*Matsot*, Heb).

[Ex 12:15-20, 13:3-10; Lev 23:6-8; Num 28:17-25; Deut 16:3-8]

Time: It began on the 15th Nisan and continued for one week until 21st Tishri.

Purpose: To commemorate the hardships of Israel's flight from Egypt (Ex 12:39).

Typology: Unleavened bread is a type of Christ in his sinless perfection [Jn 6:30-59; 1 Cor 5:8, 11:24]. It is also a type of the true church which is hidden in Christ (1 Cor 5:7-8).

Prophetic significance: Complete consecration and devotion to God. The absence of leaven sometimes symbolises the absence of sin.

3. **Day of First-Fruits** (*Bikkurim*, Heb).

[Lev 23:9-14]

Time: on the day after the Sabbath of Passover week; i.e. 16 Nisan (Lev 23:9-14).

Purpose: To dedicate and consecrate the firstfruits of the barley harvest.

Typology: A type of the resurrection of Christ [1 Cor 15:20-23].

Prophetic significance: It is the celebration of the bodily resurrection of believers in Christ [1 Cor 15:20-23].

4. **Weeks** (*Shabuot* or *Shavuoth*, Heb; *Pentecost*, Greek).

[Lev 23:15-22; Num 28:26-31; Deut 16:9-12; Acts 2:1]

Time: 6 Sivan (3rd sacred month, 9th civil month), the day after the 7th Sabbath (i.e. 50th day hence *Pentecost* meaning 50th) after the Day of Firstfruits when the barley wave-sheaf had been reaped and presented.

Purpose: To dedicate and consecrate the firstfruits of the wheat harvest.

Typology: The outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church which is the body of Christ [Acts 1:5, 2:4].

Prophetic significance: Some consider that the two loaves represent the Jewish and Gentile parts of the church and contain leaven since sin is found in the church on earth.

5. **Trumpets** (*Rosh Hashanah*, Heb).

[Lev 23:23-25; Num 10:10, 29:1-6]

Time: The first day of Tishri, the 7th month of the sacred year i.e. the Sabbatical month (the 1st month of the civil year; Sept-Oct).

Purpose: To consecrate the 7th month as the Sabbatical month.

Typology: The blowing of the trumpet is connected with the return of Christ [Matt 24:31; 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16]

Prophetic significance: The victory of God over his enemies.

6. **Day of Atonement** (*Yom Kippur*, Heb).

[Lev 16; 23:26-32; Num 29:7-11]

Time: The 10th day of the 7th month of the sacred year (Tishri).

Purpose: To perform an annual atonement for the sins of the people, priests and for the tabernacle.

Typology: The cross of Christ [Rm 11:26; Heb 9].

Prophetic significance: Christ is our atoning redeemer.

7. **Tabernacles** (*Sukkot*, Heb). Also called the Feasts of Booths or Ingathering.

[Lev 23:33-43; Num 29:12-38; Deut 16:13-17]

Time: The 15th –21st days of Tishri. An 8th day was added as a climax to all the feasts.

Purpose: A) To commemorate the deliverance and protection during the wanderings in the wilderness [Lev 23:43]. B) To celebrate the completion of the harvest [Lev 23: 39].

Typology: The peace, prosperity and fulness of the consummated kingdom of Christ [Zech 14:16-19].

Prophetic significance: Fulness of harvest, the ingathering of Christ's people.

Other sacred occasions include:

Holy Days connected with the Sabbath

- **Sabbath** - Every seventh day [Ex 20:8-11, 31:12-17; Lev 23:3; Deut 5:12-15].
- **Sabbath Year** - Every seventh year to allow the land to lie fallow [Ex 23:10-11; Lev 25:1-7].
- **Year of Jubilee** – The 50th year after seven Sabbath years. A day of liberty for slaves through debt and for returning land to former owners [Lev 25:8-55, 27:17-24; Ezek 46:17].
- **The New Moon** – The first day of the Hebrew 29 or 30 day month. Special sacrifices and blowing of Trumpets. [Num 28:11-15; Ps 81:3].
- **The Seventh New Moon or the Feast of Trumpets**

Festivals not commanded in the Mosaic Law

Dedication – (Lights, *Hanukkah*) A eight day feast in the 9th month (Chislev) commemorating the cleansing of the temple from the defilement of Syria (Jn 10:22).

Purim – (Lots) A feast of the 14th and 15th Adar (the 12th month). The name derives from the Babylonian *Pur* meaning 'Lot' [Esther 9:18-32].

To take account of the obvious precedence given to some, three are singled out as the 'Great Feasts'; i.e. Unleavened Bread, Weeks and Tabernacles. However, the phrase *great feast(s)* never appears in the Bible as a specific title of any of the holy gatherings.

It is usual to divide the feast into two groups of four and three with a long gap of four months in the middle. This is often stated to represent the present time as we await the final trumpet and the Second Coming. Graphically, these can be shown thus:

Feast	Month	Typology
Passover	14 Nisan (1 st month)	Death of Christ (deliverance)
Unleavened Bread	15 Nisan for one week	Sinlessness of Christ
Firstfruits	After the Passover week Sabbath – 16 Nisan	Resurrection of Christ
Weeks	The day after the 7 th Sabbath after First fruits – 6 Sivan	Outpouring of the Spirit of Christ
Trumpets	1 Tishri (7 th month)	Return of Christ
Day of Atonement	10 Tishri	Cross of Christ (atonement)
Tabernacles	15-21 Tishri	Ingathering of Christ's kingdom

The recurrence of the number 7

Seven is the number of divine perfection.

- Pentecost occurs 7 weeks after Passover.
- Passover and Tabernacles last 7 days each.
- The days of holy convocation are 7.
- Tabernacles and the day of Atonement fall in the 7th month.
- The cycle of annual feasts occupies 7 months, from Nisan to Tishri.

The Biblical View: Three Feasts

There were only three feasts and male Israelites were commanded to go up to Jerusalem for these festivals three times a year,

Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut 16:16).

On these days all labour was to cease. The timing of these feasts was to ensure as little interference as possible with national industry. The Passover was held just before the work of harvest started, Weeks at the end of the corn harvest and before the vintage and Tabernacles after all the fruits of the ground were gathered in. In Winter, when travel was difficult, there were no festivals.

Exodus 23:14-17 also shows clearly that there were only three feasts:

Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year. You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty);

*and the Feast of Harvest, [Weeks/Pentecost] the first-fruits of your labours which you have sown in the field;
and the Feast of Ingathering [Tabernacles] at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labours from the field. Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD.*

There was no 'Feast' of Trumpets, the Bible never calls this a feast but proclaims the blowing of trumpets during all the feasts.

Also in the day of your gladness, in your appointed feasts, and at the beginning of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be a memorial for you before your God: I am the LORD your God. [Num 10:10]

There were occasions of holy convocation [*miqra*, Heb: 'a calling together, 'assembly'] which were not feasts, as well as convocations which were (Num 28:26, 29:12). Trumpets and the Day of Atonement are stated to be convocations but not feasts (Lev 23:24, 27; Num 29:1). Also feasts were times of gladness (Num 10:10) but the Day of Atonement was solemn, a 'day of affliction' and certainly not joyful (Lev 23:27).

The offering of first-fruits was performed in two specific feasts: of the wheat harvest at Weeks (Pentecost, Ex 34:22) and of 'the first of the first-fruits' at the Passover (Ex 23:19, 34:26).

The three feasts were:

1. **The Feast of Unleavened Bread.** The Passover was the start of this feast. The Firstfruits (Lev 23:9-14) were offered on the day after the Passover Sabbath and were part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
2. **The Feast of Weeks.** Seven weeks after Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:15-16). Pentecost was the Greek name given to this feast much later when Hellenising influences spread in Israel.
3. **The Feast of Tabernacles.** This was prepared by the blowing of Trumpets on the first day of the 7th month and the Day of Atonement on the 10th day. The Feast proper began on the 15th day. The Day of Atonement was not a feast but a fast which included repentance for sin.

Each has three associations

Derived from nature (natural); experience (historical) and prophetic symbolism (typological).

Feast	Natural Assoc.	Historic Assoc.	Prophetic Assoc.
Passover/Unleavened bread	Early harvest	The Exodus	Advent and sacrifice of the Messiah
Weeks / Pentecost	Harvest or cereal ingathering	The day the Law was given (according to Maimonides and Talmud) implied by Ex 12:2 with 19:1	The outpouring of the Spirit and reorganisation of the church
Tabernacles	Ingathering of fruits	Journey through the wilderness	The final rest of God's people

The reason for only three is also found in their fulfilment. The feasts were fulfilled in the following ways:

1. **Redemption accomplished:** The Feast of Passover was when the Passover lamb was sacrificed and was the day of the Crucifixion (15 Nisan). The Feast of Unleavened Bread thus speaks of Christ accomplishing our salvation by sacrifice. He was God's First Fruits and the First-born of a new creation.
2. **Redemption applied:** The Feast of Weeks refers to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit who applies salvation.
3. **Redemption consummated:** The Feast of Tabernacles in the 7th month speaks of fulness and perfection and refers to the Second Coming of Christ, the consummation of salvation.

Salvation in Christ	Feast	Typology
Redemption Accomplished	Passover	Death of Christ (deliverance)
	Unleavened Bread	Sinlessness of Christ
	Firstfruits	Resurrection of Christ
Redemption Applied	Weeks	Outpouring of the Spirit of Christ
Redemption Consummated	Trumpets	Return of Christ
	Day of Atonement	Cross of Christ (atonement)
	Tabernacles	Ingathering of Christ's kingdom
	The 8 th Day	General Resurrection

Three is the number of God, and the Bible clearly tells us that salvation is all of God [Ps 3:8, 27:1, 38:22, 62:1, 68:20, 74:12, 85:7; Isa 12:2; Jer 3:23; Lam 3:36; Jonah 2:9; Acts 28:28; Rm 1:16; Rev 7:10, 19:1] If the festivals are a celebration of the fulness of God's plan in salvation, then the number three makes eminent sense. However, the number seven (signifying perfection in divine things) would also have symbolic significance.

We can conclude that there were seven holy convocations or gatherings but that only three of these were feasts or festivals. The sacred year was divided by, and focused upon, these three great events. As such, they instruct us about the three great aspects of the salvation planned and purposed by God for us: the cross (the kingdom purchased), the kingdom conceived and the kingdom completed.

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Appendix One

Leviticus 23

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim *to be* holy convocations, **these are My feasts**.

3 ' Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day *is* a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work *on it*; *it is* the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings.

4 ' These *are* the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times.

5 'On the fourteenth *day* of the first month at twilight *is* the LORD's Passover.

6 'And on the fifteenth day of the same month *is* **the Feast of Unleavened Bread** to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread.

7 'On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it.

8 'But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD for seven days. The seventh day *shall be* a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work *on it.*' "

9 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

10 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest.

11 'He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.

12 'And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the LORD.

13 'Its grain offering *shall be* two-tenths *of an ephah* of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to the LORD, for a sweet aroma; and its drink offering *shall be* of wine, one-fourth of a hin.

14 'You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; *it shall be* a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

15 ' And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed.

16 'Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD.

17 'You shall bring from your dwellings two wave *loaves* of two-tenths *of an ephah*. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. *They are* the firstfruits to the LORD.

18 'And you shall offer with the bread seven lambs of the first year, without blemish, one young bull, and two rams. They shall be *as* a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to the LORD.

19 'Then you shall sacrifice one kid of the goats as a sin offering, and two male lambs of the first year as a sacrifice of a peace offering.

20 'The priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits *as* a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the LORD for the priest.

21 'And you shall proclaim on the same day *that* it is **a holy convocation** to you. You shall do no customary work on it. *It shall be* a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.

22 ' When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleanings from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I *am* the LORD your God.' "

23 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

24 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'In the seventh month, on the first *day* of the month, you shall have a sabbath-*rest*, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation.

25 'You shall do no customary work on it; and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD.' "

26 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

27 "Also the tenth *day* of this seventh month *shall be* the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD.

28 "And you shall do no work on that same day, for it *is* the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God.

29 "For any person who is not afflicted *in soul* on that same day shall be cut off from his people.

30 "And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people.

31 "You shall do no manner of work; *it shall be* a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

32 "It *shall be* to you a sabbath of *solemn* rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth *day* of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath."

33 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

34 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'The fifteenth day of this seventh month *shall be the Feast of Tabernacles* for seven days to the LORD.

35 'On the first day *there shall be* a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it.

36 'For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. It *is* a sacred assembly, *and* you shall do no customary work *on it*.

37 'These *are* the feasts of the LORD which you shall proclaim *to be* holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire to the LORD, a burnt offering and a grain offering, a sacrifice and drink offerings, everything on its day --

38 'besides the Sabbaths of the LORD, besides your gifts, besides all your vows, and besides all your freewill offerings which you give to the LORD.

39 ' Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the LORD *for seven days*; on the first day *there shall be* a sabbath-*rest*, and on the eighth day a sabbath-*rest*.

40 'And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days.

41 'You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. *It shall be* a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month.

42 'You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths,

43 'that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I *am* the LORD your God.' "

44 So Moses declared to the children of Israel the feasts of the LORD.

Feasts

4150 d[eAm moʷəd {mo-ade'} or **d[emo** moʷəd {mo-ade'} or (fem.) **hd'['Am** moʷədah (2 Chr 8:13) {mo-aw-daw'} • from 03259; TWOT - 878b; n m • AV - congregation 150, feast 23, season 13, appointed 12, time 12, assembly 4, solemnity 4, solemn 2, days 1, sign 1, synagogues 1; 223 • 1) appointed place, appointed time, meeting 1a) appointed time 1a1) appointed time (general) 1a2) sacred season, set feast, appointed season 1b) appointed meeting 1c) appointed place 1d) appointed sign or signal 1e) tent of meeting

Feast

2282 GX; chag {khag} or **GX;** chag {khawg} • from 02287; TWOT - 602a; n m • AV - feast 56, sacrifice 3, feast days 2, solemnity 1; 62 • 1) festival, feast, festival-gathering, pilgrim-feast 1a) feast 1b) festival sacrifice

Deut 16

"Observe the month of Abib, and keep 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 "Therefore you shall sacrifice the Passover to the LORD your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place where the LORD chooses to put His name.

3 "You shall eat no leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it, *that is*, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), that you may remember the day in which you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life.

4 "And no leaven shall be seen among you in all your territory for seven days, nor shall *any* of the meat which you sacrifice the first day at twilight remain overnight until morning.

5 "You may not sacrifice the Passover within any of your gates which the LORD your God gives you;

6 "but at the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide, there you shall sacrifice the Passover at twilight, at the going down of the sun, at the time you came out of Egypt.

7 "And you shall roast and eat *it* in the place which the LORD your God chooses, and in the morning you shall turn and go to your tents.

8 "Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there *shall be a sacred assembly to the LORD your God. You shall do no work on it.*

9 " You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from *the time* you begin *to put* the sickle to the grain.

10 "Then you shall keep **the Feast of Weeks** to the LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the LORD your God blesses you.

11 "You shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who *is* within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who *are* among you, at the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide.

12 "And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.

13 " You shall observe **the Feast of Tabernacles** seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress.

14 "And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who *are* within your gates.

15 "Seven days you shall keep a sacred 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 surely rejoice.

16 "Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at **the Feast of Unleavened Bread**, at **the Feast of Weeks**, and at the **Feast of Tabernacles**; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.

Exod 23

" Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year:

15 "You shall keep **the Feast of Unleavened Bread** (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty);

16 "and the **Feast of Harvest, [Weeks]** the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field;

and the **Feast of Ingathering [Tabernacles]** at the end of the year, when you have gathered in *the fruit of* your labors from the field.

17 "Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD.

Comment

It will be noted that in the Exodus passage and Deut 16:16 all three festivals called 'feasts' in one place. In Lev 23, Unleavened Bread and Tabernacles are called feasts but Weeks is only called a holy convocation. In Deut 16, Unleavened Bread is only called a sacred assembly,¹ while Weeks and Tabernacles are called 'feasts'. (However, all three are called feasts at the end in v16.)

The slight differences appear to have no great import being due to the style and specific purposes of the writing by Moses. What is important is that only these three festivals are called feasts and the other sacred days are appendages to the festival, albeit they are important days as well.

¹ 6116 hr'c'[] `atsarah {ats-aw-raw'} or tr,c,[] `atsereth {ats-eh'-reth} • from 06113; TWOT - 1675c; n f • AV - solemn assembly 9, solemn meeting 1, assembly 1; 11 • 1) assembly, solemn assembly 1a) assembly (sacred or festive meeting) 1b) assemblage, company, group.