

# ROSE GUIDE TO THE FEASTS, FESTIVALS AND FASTS OF THE BIBLE



**ROSE**  
PUBLISHING

Paul H. Wright, Editor

WINTER

SPRING



☆ Modern Israeli Holidays

■ Pilgrimage Feasts

\* Name of the month in the Old Testament

**COUNTING THE OMER** – The 49 days (7 weeks) from Firstfruits (Omer HaReishit) to the Feast of Weeks.

**FAST OF THE FIFTH MONTH** – Tisha b'Av (TIH-sha b'AV). Marks the destruction of the First and Second Temples.

**FAST OF THE FOURTH MONTH** – Marks the date Jerusalem's walls were breached in the Babylonian siege.

**FAST OF THE SEVENTH MONTH** – Fast of Gedaliah. Marks the assassination of the Jewish governor Gedaliah under the Babylonians.

**FAST OF THE TENTH MONTH** – Marks the date the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem began.

**FIRSTFRUITS** – This word identifies two festivals: Omer HaReishit (OH-mer ha-ray-SHEET), "sheaf of the firstfruit," which is part of Passover week and marks the start of the barley harvest and Counting the Omer; and Yom HaBikkurim (YOHM ha-bi-kur-REEM), "day of the firstfruits," another name for Shavuot.

**HANUKKAH** (KHA-nu-kah) – Feast of Dedication. Celebrates the rededication of the temple after the Maccabean victory. Celebrated for eight days with lighting candles on a menorah each day.

**LAG B'OMER** (Lahg b'OH-mer) – Minor holiday on the 33<sup>rd</sup> day of Counting the Omer. A happy day that serves as break from the solemnness of the Omer period.

**LUNISOLAR CALENDAR** – The Jewish lunisolar (moon and sun) calendar with 12 months numbering 29 or 30 days each. Nisan marks the beginning of the religious year and Tishri the civil year. A leap month, Adar II, is added about every three years.

**PASSOVER** – Pesach (PAY-sakh). Commemorates Israel's exodus from Egypt. Observed after sundown of 14 Nisan, hence the start of 15 Nisan. Today, it is a weeklong festival beginning with a Seder (SAY-der) meal.

**PILGRIMAGE FEASTS** – Three major feasts of ancient Israel: Passover (Pesach), Weeks (Shavuot), and Booths (Sukkot). Usually designated in the Bible as "feasts" using the Hebrew word *haggim* (kha-GEEM, plural), *hag* (KHAG, singular).

**PURIM** (PUR-im) – Feast of Esther, Lots. Celebrates the Jews' deliverance as told in the book of Esther. Today, it is a joyous holiday with reading the Scroll of Esther, costumes, and pastries.

**ROSH HASHANAH** (ROHSH ha-SHA-nah) – New Year's Day, Yom Teruah, Day of Trumpets. First of the High Holy Days and begins the civil year with sounding the shofar (ram's horn).

**ROSH HODESH** (ROHSH KHOH-desh) – New Moon. In biblical times, it announced the monthly sighting of the crescent moon, the start of each month. A minor holiday today.

**SABBATH** – Shabbat (Sha-BAHT). Observed weekly (Saturday), beginning at sunset on Friday with lighting candles and sharing a Sabbath meal. A day to rest and cease from work.

**SHAVUOT** (Sha-vu-OHT) – Feast of Weeks, Pentecost (in Greek), Yom HaBikkurim ("day of the firstfruits"). Observed the 50<sup>th</sup> day at the end of Counting the Omer. Marks the start of the wheat harvest. Believed to be the day God gave Torah to Israel on Mount Sinai and the Holy Spirit to believers in Jesus in Acts 2.

**SHEMINI ATZERET** (Sheh-ME-ne ah-TZER-et, Eighth Day of Assembly) and **SIMCHAT TORAH** (Sim-KHAT to-RAH, "Rejoicing in/of the Torah") – Observed at the end of the week of Sukkot. Today, marks the conclusion of the annual Torah reading cycle. Celebrated as two days outside Israel and one day in Israel.

**SUKKOT** (Su-KOHT) – Feast of Booths, Tabernacles. Weeklong commemoration of Israel's wilderness sojourn after the exodus. Today, Jews construct booths and share meals in them.

**TEN DAYS OF REPENTANCE** – Ten days from Rosh HaShanah through Yom Kippur, a period of penitence, prayer, and Torah reading.

**TU B'AV** (TOO b'AV) – A "Valentine's Day" of sorts, a day for matchmaking and romance. Marks the beginning of the grape harvest.

**TU B'SHEVAT** (TOO b'sheh-VAHT) – Jewish Arbor Day marking the start of the year for orchards.

**UNLEAVENED BREAD** – Hag HaMatzot (KHAG ha-ma-TZOHT), Feast of Matzah. For seven days unleavened bread (matzah) is eaten to recall Israel's hasty exodus from Egypt.

**YOM HAATZMAUT** (YOHM ha-atz-ma-OOT) – Independence Day celebrating the establishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948.

**YOM HASHOAH** (YOHM ha-SHO-ah) – A day to honor those who died in the Holocaust and the heroism of those who resisted.

**YOM HAZIKKARON** (YOHM ha-zik-ka-ROHN) – Israel's Memorial Day remembering fallen soldiers and victims of hostile acts, observed the day before Independence Day.

**YOM KIPPUR** (YOHM kih-PUR) – Day of Atonement, Yom HaKippurim (YOHM ha-kih-pu-REEM "day of atonements"). Final High Holy Day, a most solemn day of fasting. In biblical times, it was the day the high priest entered the tabernacle/temple and made atonement for sins. Also marks the end of the grape harvest.



## FEASTS OF HEARTH AND HOME

It's time to take a look at specific feasts that are mentioned in the Old Testament. Our approach will be to take a comparative view. This means we'll look at which feasts ancient Israel celebrated, how they differed from the feasts of their neighbors, and how they differed from what we know as the "biblical feasts."

The first thing we notice is that the Israelites celebrated a great many feasts, more than the well-known pilgrimage festivals of Passover, Weeks, and Booths. So we'll start our discussion with feasts that the Bible typically calls *mishteh*, the common term for a feast or banquet. We will also include some other feasts that Israel celebrated early on, as well as other instances where feasting is implied, such as on the Sabbath or at the new moon. Some of these feasts marked family events or life passages. Others were tied to seasonal activities. Many observed cyclical passages of time, either weekly, monthly, or annually. Typically, they were celebrated locally, in the village or out in the countryside, in a home (tent, house, or palace) or at a shrine, for a select group of people such as a family or clan, members of a work gang, or even the royal court. Some required a short pilgrimage to a shared high place or the site where the tabernacle was set up, before all the elaborate trappings of the Jerusalem temple and priesthood had developed. Overall, we can characterize these more common and local observances as "feasts of hearth and home."

At every level, these celebrations were communal and nearly always involved eating something that was above and beyond one's normal daily diet. In addition, in one way or another, all served to recognize, embrace, and reinforce the participants' identity, whether it was with their family, their clan or tribe, their people, or their God.

The biblical prophets help us see that all too often the identity that many Israelites reinforced had

more in common with that of the pagan Canaanites than it did with the commands of the Lord God. But, we recall, we can assume that *some* of the ways and *some* of the reasons that the Israelite celebrations were similar to those of their neighbors were due to a shared climate, agricultural cycle, and moon-based calendar. (As today, Christmas trees are put up by believers and non-believers alike.)

Even though Israel participated in the world of the ancient Near East, they also stood apart from it. In the end, all of the biblical feasts, including those of hearth and home, helped define Israel's cultural and personal identity just as much as they were occasions to celebrate normal passages of life.

## Feasts for Hospitality

Another occasion for feasting that the Bible mentions is hospitality, and here we are on more familiar, comfortable ground. Examples are numerous, since acts of hospitality that centered on a meal were an essential part of ancient Near Eastern culture. Offering food and drink was expected nearly every time people met, whether it is mentioned in the texts or not. This makes hospitality an underlying value for all our categories of feasting.

The template for hospitality is the detailed account of Abraham and Sarah entertaining strangers—angels unaware—in their tent (Gen. 18:1–8). They spared no effort, giving the best that they had of food, drink (milk rather than wine due to their status as herders, not farmers), and attention to their visitors' needs, without rushing the moment in any way.

Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes." And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly. Then he took curds and milk and the

them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate. (Gen. 18:6–8)

Later, when the angelic visitors arrived at Sodom, Lot hosted them in his house, preparing a feast (*mishteh*) that included unleavened bread (Gen. 19:3). That the people of Sodom were decidedly *inhospitable* that night only heightens our picture of what proper table fellowship should be (Gen. 19:4–22).

## Feasts for Special Occasions

Many of the feasts and celebrations (*mishteh*) recorded in the Bible mark special occasions that were above and beyond the norms of common hospitality. Some were held to seal a covenant, celebrate a victory, confirm kingship, or mark a grand accomplishment. Others came with ulterior motives: to curry favor or entice and entrap an enemy. Many were “political” on one level or another. Here are just five of the many examples found in the Bible:

- ✦ Isaac reestablished the covenant that Abimelech, the king of Gerar, had made with his father Abraham by hosting a feast: “they ate and drank” together (Gen. 26:26–31; compare with Gen. 21:22–34). The mutual oaths that Isaac and Abimelech made the next morning sealed their relationship, allowing each their own grazing land and, by implication, the obligation of mutual aid.
- ✦ After Saul’s death, David, newly anointed as king of Judah, hosted Saul’s close relative and general, Abner, at a feast. It was at this feast where Abner pledged his loyalty and that of all Israel to David, even though Abner had been a natural candidate for the throne (2 Sam. 3:17–21). Shortly afterward David’s general Joab killed Abner under the pretext that his pledge was a trap (vv. 22–30).
- ✦ The newly crowned Solomon offered sacrifices to the Lord and gave a celebratory feast for his servants after God, in a vision at the high place of Gibeon, had granted his request for wisdom (1 Kings 3:4–15).
- ✦ The prophet Isaiah described a great feast that God will make for all people following his victory over death, the greatest of enemies, where death itself is an item to be consumed: “He will swallow up death forever” (Isa. 25:8). “On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined” (v. 6).
- ✦ Perhaps the most garish feast described in the Bible was the one hosted by Ahasuerus, king of the Medes and Persians, who threw a seven-day drinking party with his royal court in his opulent palace garden (Est. 1:1–10). During the feast, “the heart of the king was [a bit too] merry with wine” (v. 10)—and thereby unfolds the story of Esther.

## Feasts Connected with Sacrifice

Sacrifices of animals, grain, or baked goods offered to God were also, quite naturally, occasions for feasting.<sup>34</sup> The Israelites made most of their sacrifices at local shrines, even during time periods when the temple stood in Jerusalem.<sup>35</sup> Before mentioning examples of sacrifices, we might first reflect a bit on the act of sacrifice itself.

Full of intention and awe, sacrifice is denying oneself in favor of the absolute weightiness of the Other.<sup>36</sup> This weightiness is felt most strongly when the sacrifice is a living being, an act that involves shedding blood—an animal alive, then dead, bringing life (Lev. 17:11, 14). Hostile and impure before the sacrifice, the offerer leaves the high place or altar purified and at peace. God accepted the sacrifices of the people of Israel under the framework of his covenant, whereby

the sacrifice demonstrated the unbreakable link between God and his people; a community seared together; bound in obedience and will; manifest by righteousness, forgiveness, and grace.

The Israelites sacrificed animals, foods, and drinks common to feasts, with the best portions designated as the offering. This is most clearly seen in Leviticus, parts of which are a kind of priests' manual. With the exception of the burnt offering (*olah*; Lev. 1:1–17; 6:8–13; 7:8) and drink offering (*neseq*; Num. 15:7, 10; 28:7), the act of sacrifice included the act of either the priest or the offerer (or both) eating the largest portion of what was given. The priests were to eat their portions of meat and grain within the confines of the tabernacle or temple, a sacred duty that also met their daily practical needs.

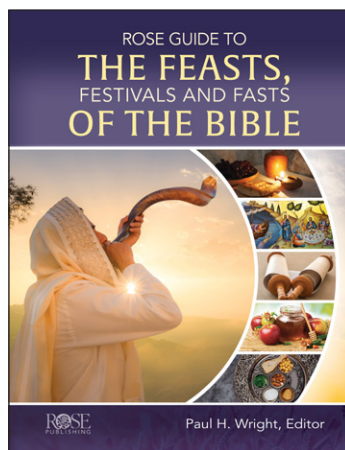


Sacrifices on the altar at the dedication of the First Temple built by King Solomon. The Levitical priests are depicted in the foreground with musical instruments, as other priests line the ramp of the altar. (William Brassey Hole, 1846–1917)

The peace offering is particularly interesting. In this sacrifice, the offerer ate his meat portion of the offering as a feast, together with his family and anyone else in need of the sacrifice. For this reason, we can think of the peace offering as a fellowship or communion offering, signaling not only the well-being of God with his people but the communal well-being of the people themselves.<sup>37</sup> When a person offered multiple sacrifices, the peace offering came last to conclude with the wholeness represented by the shared feast. The sequence of offering sacrifices was to sacrifice first for atonement, then for holiness, and then for fellowship.<sup>38</sup>

We must note that though the sacrifices mentioned in the Bible were eaten with God in his divine presence, he was not consuming (or eating) the sacrifice as the offerers were. This is important to note because Israel's neighbors believed that their gods had to be fed in order to be content and in turn bless the one making the sacrifice. For them, the sacrifice was a meal eaten together with their gods.<sup>39</sup> Contrary to this popular belief, the Bible is clear that God neither needs nor consumes the sacrificial item (Ps. 50:12–13). He is, however, present with the offerer and pleased by the aroma when the food is burned, the smell being the tangible sign that the sacrifice was complete (Gen. 8:20–21; Lev. 1:9). It is significant that the very act of sacrificing to God—replete with menus and recipes describing how the food should be prepared (Lev. 3:9–17; 6:19–23; 7:12; Num. 15:1–10; 28:1–8)—strengthened the same values that accompanied feasting: reconciliation between two parties, forging a shared identity, building community, and establishing trust.





## Rose Guide to the Feasts, Festivals and Fasts of the Bible

God commanded Moses and the children of Israel to observe feasts and holy days as memorials to the great things that he had done in their lives. Understanding these times of celebration are important to help us better see God's complete picture and plan of redemption.

Featuring text from: Dr. Paul Wright explores the celebrations, festivals, observances, and feasts, Rabbi Moshe Silberschein looks at the ways the festivals and holy days of ancient Israel were celebrated, Educator Ophir Yarden describes ways Jews keep the biblical feasts today, Pastor Steven Lancaster looks at how and why the festivals and holy days of ancient Israel, Rev. Heidi Kinner presents ways the early Church interpreted the feasts of the Bible.

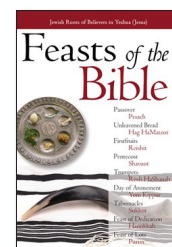
*Hardcover* ..... 978-1-64938-021-0 ..... \$34.99



## Messiah in the Feasts of Israel

In this book, learn the details of each of the Feasts, their fulfillment in Messiah, and their implications for your life. Dive in for an in-depth and fascinating study that will deepen your understanding of God's Word as you see His plan in a whole new light.

*Softcover* ..... 978-0-97026-197-7 ..... \$14.99



## Feasts of the Bible, Pamphlet

Throughout the Old Testament, God commanded the people of Israel to observe feasts and holy days (holidays) to remember the mighty things that He had done in the lives of Israel's ancestors. This full-color pamphlet celebrates and explains the meaning behind the biblical feasts and why they are important today.

*Pamphlet* ..... 978-1-89094-758-3 ..... \$4.99



## Bible Study Made Easy

Featuring charts, simple summaries, and practical tips, this quick guide is a great introduction to Bible study, going step-by-step through the basic principles. Discover how to use concordances, find out how to dig deeper with Bible dictionaries, and learn how to apply God's Word to your life through inductive Bible studies.

*Softcover* ..... 978-1-62862-343-7 ..... \$5.99

**HENDRICKSON**  
Publishing Group

[www.hendricksonrose.com](http://www.hendricksonrose.com) | [info@hendricksonrose.com](mailto:info@hendricksonrose.com)  
or call (800) 358-3111



**Money Back  
Guarantee!**

**ECPA**  
EVANGELICAL  
CHRISTIAN PUBLISHERS  
ASSOCIATION