

Hebrew Roots of our Faith

He is the Vine and we are His Branches

The Root and the Branches

“For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? For if the first fruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.”

Romans 11.13-18

A Timetable

We in the western world have been raised in a culture dominated by a post-Constantinian Christian worldview of time, rather than one that is biblically Hebrew. Our days begin and end at midnight, rather than the biblical breaking point of sunset. Our days are named after celestial bodies and Norse gods revered in pagan worship and our work week begins on Monday and ends with a day of rest on Sunday (the first day of the week), rather than continuing the biblical pattern that Jesus and His disciples adhered to of keeping Sabbath on the seventh day.

Our Gregorian calendar years are numbered from the birth of Christ, rather than from the traditional Hebrew reckoning of the beginning of creation. And we have replaced the biblically instituted feasts of Pesach (**Passover**), **Shavuot**, **Rosh Hashanah**, **Yom Kippur**, and **Sukkot** celebrated by the people of Israel with a variety of newly-minted Christian seasons like Advent and Lent and holy days like Christmas and Easter, as well as secular and neo-pagan holidays (holy days?) like New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Halloween, and Thanksgiving.

Rediscovering the worldview and timeframe of our Hebrew heritage allows us to more fully appreciate the activities of Jesus of Nazareth at the time of His earthly ministry, crucifixion, death, and resurrection.

The Jewish Calendar

A traditional Biblical approach to reckoning time

Years

The Jewish year starts on **Rosh Hashanah**, “the Head of the Year,” the day when Adam and Eve were created. The number of any given year is the amount of years which have elapsed since creation. To find the corresponding Jewish year for any year on the Gregorian calendar, add 3760 to the Gregorian number, if it is before Rosh Hashanah. After Rosh Hashanah, add 3761.

Months

The Jewish calendar is based on lunar cycles. Towards the beginning of the moon's cycle, it appears as a thin crescent. That is the signal for a new Jewish month. The moon grows until it is full in the middle of the month, and then it begins to wane until it cannot be seen. It remains invisible for approximately two days and then the thin crescent reappears and the cycle begins again.

The entire cycle takes approximately 29½ days. Since a month needs to consist of complete days, a month is sometimes twenty-nine days long, and sometimes thirty. Knowing exactly when the month begins has always been important in Jewish practice, because the Torah schedules the Jewish festivals according to the days of the month.

The first day of the month, as well as the thirtieth day of a long month, is called Rosh Chodesh, the “Head of the Month,” and has semi-festive status.

Dates of Holidays

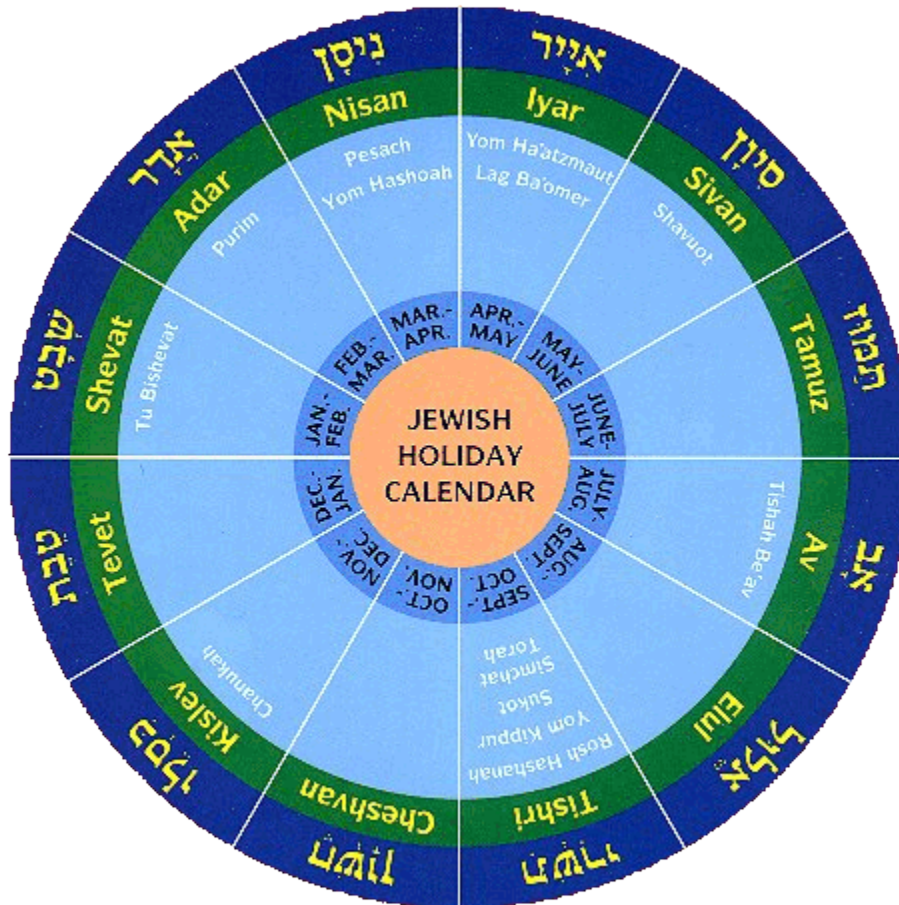
The story is told that one man in a synagogue was overheard to ask another, “When is Hanukkah this year?” The other man smiled slyly and replied, “Same as always: the 25th of Kislev.” This humorous comment makes an important point: the date of Jewish holidays does not change from year to year. Holidays are celebrated on the same day of the Jewish calendar every year, but the Jewish year is not the same length as a solar year on the civil calendar used by most of the western world, so the date shifts on the civil calendar. **Click here** for a list of the exact calendar dates of major and minor Jewish holidays projected into the future.

The Jewish calendar has the following months:

Hebrew	English	Holiday Dates	Length	Civil Equivalent
ניסן	1. Nissan	The New Year for Jewish kings and festivals is celebrated on Nissan 1; Passover starts on Nissan 15	30 days	March-April
אייר	2. Iyar	Lag B'Omer on Iyar 19 marks the 33rd day of the Counting of the Omer	29 days	April-May
סיון	3. Sivan	Shavuot commemorates the giving of the Law 50 days (“Pentecost”) after Passover on Sivan 6-7	30 days	May-June
תמוז	4. Tammuz		29 days	June-July
אב	5. Av	Tisha B'Av (the 9th of Av) commemorates historical Jewish tragedies	30 days	July-August
אלול	6. Elul	The New Year for animal tithes is celebrated on Elul 1	29 days	August-September
תשרי	7. Tishri	The High Holidays (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur), Sukkot , Shmini Atzeret, and Simchat Torah	30 days	September-October
חשוון	8. Cheshvan		29 or 30 days	October-November
כסלו	9. Kislev	Hanukkah celebrations start on Kislev 25	30 or 29 days	November-December
טבת	10. Tevet	Conclusion of Hanukkah	29 days	December-January
שבט	11. Shevat	Tu b'Shevat “New Year of the Trees” or Jewish Arbor Day	30 days	January-February
אדר	12. Adar	Purim	30 days	February-March
אדר א' אדר ב'	12. Adar I (leap years only) 13. Adar Beit (in leap years)	Purim celebrated in Adar Beit	29 days	February-March

Days

According to the account in Genesis, when God created time He first created night and then day (*And it was evening and it was morning, one day*” – Genesis 1:5). Therefore, a Jewish calendar date begins with the night beforehand. While a day in the secular calendar begins and ends at midnight, a Jewish day goes from nightfall to nightfall. Shabbat begins on Friday night, and on those dates where certain activities are restricted – such as working on Shabbat or major holidays – the restrictions go into effect the night beforehand, except for most fast days which begin at dawn.



Yom Kippur

The Day of Atonement

יום כפור

...In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and you shall not do any work ... For on that day he shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you from all your sins before the LORD. -Leviticus 16.29-30

Yom Kippur is probably the most important holiday of the Jewish year. Many Jews who do not observe any other Jewish custom will refrain from work, fast and/or attend synagogue services on this day. Yom Kippur occurs on the 10th day of Tishri at the close of the High Holy Days ("Days of Awe") season that opened with **Rosh Hashanah**. The holiday is instituted at Leviticus 23.26 and following.

The name “Yom Kippur” means “Day of Atonement,” and that pretty much explains what the holiday is. It is a day set aside to “afflict the soul,” to atone for the sins of the past year. According to tradition, in Days of Awe all of our names are inscribed in “books” kept by God. On Yom Kippur, the judgment entered in these books is sealed. This day is, essentially, your last appeal, your last chance to change the judgment, to demonstrate your repentance and make amends.

However, Yom Kippur atones only for sins between man and God, not for sins against another person. To atone for sins against another person, you must first seek reconciliation with that person, righting the wrongs you committed against them if possible. That must all be done before Yom Kippur.



Yom Kippur is kept as a complete Sabbath; no work can be performed on that day, and observant people are supposed to refrain from eating and drinking (even water). It is a complete, 25-hour fast beginning before sunset on the evening before Yom Kippur and ending after nightfall on the day of Yom Kippur. The Talmud also specifies additional restrictions that are less well-known: washing and bathing, anointing one’s body (with cosmetics, deodorants, etc.), wearing leather shoes (Orthodox Jews routinely wear canvas sneakers under their dress clothes on Yom Kippur), and engaging in sexual relations are all prohibited on Yom Kippur.

As always, any of these restrictions can be lifted where a threat to life or health is involved. In fact, children under the age of nine and women in childbirth (from the time labor begins until three days after birth) are **not permitted** to fast, even if they want to. Older children and women from the third to the seventh day after childbirth are permitted to fast, but are permitted to break the fast if they feel the need to do so. People with other illnesses should consult a physician and a rabbi for advice.

Most of the holiday is spent in the synagogue, in prayer. In Orthodox synagogues, services begin early in the morning (8 or 9 am) and continue until about 3 pm. People then usually go home for an afternoon nap and return around 5 or 6 pm for the afternoon and evening services, which continue until nightfall. The services end at nightfall, with the blowing of the tekiah gedolah, a long blast on the shofar. See Rosh Hashanah for more about the shofar.

It is customary to wear white on the holiday, which symbolizes purity and calls to mind the promise that our sins shall be made as white as snow (Isaiah 1.18). Some people wear a kittel, the white robe in which the dead are buried.

Rosh Hashanah

"The Jewish New Year"



Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, has been celebrated each fall for millennia. Though Rosh Hashanah in Hebrew הַשָּׁנָה הַרִאשׁוֹנָה literally means “head of the year,” the holiday actually takes place on the first two days of the Hebrew month of Tishrei, which is the seventh month on the Hebrew calendar. This is because Rosh Hashanah, one of four new years in the Jewish year, is considered the new year of people, animals and legal contracts. In the Jewish oral tradition, Rosh Hashanah marks the completion of the creation of the world.

Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of the Jewish High Holy Days, or Yamim Noraim (the “Days of Awe”), and is followed 10 days later by Yom Kippur, the “day of atonement.” The Mishnah refers to Rosh Hashanah as the “day of judgment,” and it is believed that God opens the Book of Life on this day and begins to decide who shall live and who shall die. The days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are viewed as an opportunity for Jews to “repent” (teshuvah in Hebrew תשובה, which literally means “return” to God) and ensure a good fate.



Jews traditionally gather in synagogues on Rosh Hashanah for extended services that follow the liturgy of a special prayerbook, called a mahzor, that is used during the Days of Awe. At specific times throughout the service, a shofar, or ram’s horn, is blown. The mitzvah (commandment) to hear the shofar, a literal and spiritual wake-up call, is special to this time of year.

The new year is the only Jewish holiday that is observed for two days by all Jews (other holidays are observed for just one day within the Land of Israel) as it is also the only major holiday that falls on a new moon.

A common greeting on Rosh Hashanah is shanah tovah u'metukah, Hebrew (שָׁנָה טוֹבָה וּמְתוּקָה) for “a good and sweet new year.” Many traditional Rosh Hashanah foods — apples and honey, raisin challah, honey cake and pomegranate — are eaten, in part, for this reason.

[Click here](#) to read more about this meaningful holiday.

Sukkot

The Feast of Tabernacles



Every fall following **Rosh Hashanah** and the High Holidays or “Days of Awe” and accompanied by the solemn fast and deep contemplations of Yom Kippur, we enter on one of our faith’s most lasting celebrations, Sukkot or the Feast of Tabernacles.

Every biblical holiday given to the Jewish people has these three aspects: Israel was commanded to observe the holiday in the present in order to remember something God had done in the past, and because of some future prophetic purpose hidden within each festival.

Thus Jewish people begin Shabbat each week by lighting of two candles, which stand for “Keep” and “Remember”. In so doing, they remember how God rested on the seventh day of Creation while also looking forward to the Millennial rest promised for the whole earth.

Likewise, **Passover** and **Pentecost** look back on the great Exodus from Egypt and the giving of the law at Sinai, while Christians believe that their hidden prophetic purposes were fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus and the birth of the Church fifty days later.

Sukkot or the Feast of Tabernacles is the third great annual pilgrimage festival when the Jewish people gather together in Jerusalem not only to remember God’s provision in the Wilderness but also to look ahead to that promised Messianic age when all nations will flow to Jerusalem to worship the Lord.

Then everyone who survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And if any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, there will be no rain on them. And if the family of Egypt does not go up and present themselves, then on them there shall be no rain; there shall be the plague with which the Lord afflicts the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. This shall be the punishment to Egypt and the punishment to all the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. Zechariah 14:16-19

[Click here](#) for information about the ICEJ Feast of Tabernacles celebrations in Jerusalem.

Hanukkah

A Festival of Lights or Feast of Dedication

What is Hanukkah?

Hanukkah (which in Hebrew means ‘to dedicate’) is also referred to as the Festival of Lights or the Feast of Dedication. It is a holiday, lasting eight days, that celebrates the re-dedication of Jerusalem’s temple in 164 B.C.

Here is a brief history of Hanukkah. In 175 B.C., Antiochus Epiphanes became ruler of the Seleucid Empire. His goal was to unite the Greek-related elements of his empire and to force, if necessary, those who did not live based on the Greek culture (e.g. those in Judea) to do so.

In 167 B.C. he ordered that a pagan altar dedicated to the false god Zeus be placed inside the temple in Jerusalem. Unclean animals like pigs were ordered to be brought to the new altar and sacrificed. Right after this occurred a man named Mattathias, a priest who served in the temple, began a revolt against the Seleucids by refusing to worship the Greek gods forced on Judea by Antiochus.



Although Mattathias soon died after the revolt started, his son Judas assumed his dad’s leadership role and continued the rebellion as its military commander. He was so zealous and ferocious in battle that he earned the name Judas Maccabaeus (or Judah the Maccabee), which translated as “Judah the Hammer.”

Judas eventually lead the people to a stunning victory over the Seleucids. He entered Jerusalem after Judea won back its independence. He had the pagan altar erected by the Seleucids removed from the temple, had the temple itself religiously purified, and restored the worship of the true God. The re-dedication of Jerusalem’s temple happened on the twenty-fifth day Kislev, which is roughly our month of December. Tradition states that although only one day’s worth of oil could be found for the Temple’s menorah, which burned all through the night, it somehow burned for a total of 8 days. This period was the same as the time it took to prepare and dedicate new oil for the Temple.

When the royal Hasmonean family overpowered and was victorious over the Greeks, they searched and found only a single cruse of pure oil... enough to light the menorah for a single day. A miracle occurred, and they lit the menorah with this oil for eight days. On the following year, they established these eight days as days of festivity and praise and thanksgiving to God. (Talmud, Shabbat 21b)

Traditions

Hanukkah has never been considered a very important religious holiday even though it is often celebrated in our modern world due to its proximity to Christmas. The holiday's religious significance is far less than that of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Passover, and Shavu'ot. It is roughly equivalent to Purim in significance, and you won't find many non-Jews who have even heard of Purim! Hanukkah is not mentioned in the Old Testament; the story is related in the apocryphal book of Maccabees, which is not accepted as scripture by either the Jewish or much of the Christian community.

Religious

The only religious observance related to the holiday is the 8-day ceremony of lighting of candles in commemoration of the miracle of the multiplying of the oil. The candles are arranged in a candelabrum called a menorah that holds nine candles: one for each night, plus a shammas (servant) at a different height.



Food and Gifts

It is traditional to eat fried foods on Hanukkah because of the significance of oil to the holiday. Among Ashkenazic Jews, this usually includes latkes (pronounced "lot-kuhs" or "lot-keys" depending on where your grandmother comes from. Pronounced "potato pancakes" if you are a goy.)

Gift-giving is not a traditional part of the holiday, but has been added in places where Jews have a lot of contact with Christians as a way of dealing with children's jealousy of their Christian friends. It is extremely unusual for Jews to give Hanukkah gifts to anyone other than their own young children. The only traditional gift of the holiday is "gelt," small amounts of money.

Playing Dreidel

Another tradition of the holiday is playing dreidel, a gambling game played with a square top. Most people play for matchsticks, pennies, M&Ms, nuts, or chocolate coins. The traditional explanation of this game is that during the time of Antiochus' oppression, those who wanted to study Torah, which was an illegal activity, would conceal their activity by playing common and legal gambling games with a top whenever an official or inspector was within sight.



A dreidel is marked with four Hebrew letters: Nun, Gimel, Hei and Shin. These letters stand for the Hebrew phrase "Nes Gadol Hayah Sham", a great miracle happened there, referring to the miracle of the oil. The letters also stand for the Yiddish words nit (nothing), gantz (all), halb (half) and shtell (put), which are the rules of the game!

There are some variations in the way people play the game, but one is that everyone puts in a coin or other token. A person spins the dreidel. If it lands on Nun, nothing happens; on Gimel (or "gimmel!"), you get the whole pot; on Hei, you get half of the pot; and on Shin, you put a token in. When the pot is empty, everybody puts another token in. Keep playing until one person has everything. Then redivide it, because nobody likes a poor winner.

Tu b'Shevat

"New Year of the Trees" or Jewish Arbor Day

What is Tu b'Shevat?

Although not specifically established as a holiday in the Bible, the 15th of Shevat on the **Jewish calendar** (which usually occurs in either late January or February) is the day that marks the beginning of a “new year” for trees. This is the season in which the earliest-blooming trees in the Land of Israel emerge from their winter sleep and begin a new fruit-bearing cycle.

The date is marked by eating fruit, particularly from the kinds that are singled out by the Torah in its praise of the bounty of the Holy Land: grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates. On this day we remember that “man is a tree of the field” (Deuteronomy 20:19), and reflect on the lessons we can derive from our botanical analogue.



What Do People Do?

Jewish people mark this day by eating a symbolic meal of fruit and nuts or planting trees. Many make a special effort to eat a meal consisting of dried fruit and nuts accompanied by red wine or grape juice. They often share this meal with family members and close friends. Some people pickle or candy the *etrog* (a citrus fruit) used at the ceremonies during Sukkot and eat it on Tu b'Shevat.

Many Jewish people, particularly in Israel and on kibbutzim, plant trees or take part in activities to further **environmental awareness**. In this respect, Tu b'Shevat has a lot in common with Arbor Day celebrations around the world.

Public Life

Tu b'Shevat is not a public holiday in countries such as Israel, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom or the United States. However, some Jewish organizations may be closed or offer a limited service to allow for festivities to occur on this day.

Background

According to some readings of Jewish law, fruit that ripens in the first three years that a tree gives fruit is considered *orlah*. This means that it is not kosher and thus not acceptable for Jewish people to eat. Tu b'Shevat marks the “new year” or “birthday” of trees. Fruit that ripens in the third year on or after the 15th day

of the month of Shevat is kosher. Traditionally, the fruit that ripened in the fourth year was taken to the temple as a tithe. This is now paid symbolically using coins.

Some Jewish people began to hold a **symbolic seder** (meal) on Tu b'Shevat after 1600 CE. This consisted of different types of fruit and nuts, each of which had a specific spiritual meaning. This custom is still alive for some Jewish groups.

Tu b'Shevat is one of four Jewish new years.

1. One of the most well known is **Rosh Hashana** – the “Head of the Year” – on the first day of the month of Tishrei.
2. The New Year for Jewish kings and festivals is on the first day of the month of Nissan.
3. The New Year for animal tithes is on the first day of the month of Elul.
4. The New Year of the Trees is always on the 15th of Shevat.

Symbols

Important symbols of Tu b'Shevat include different types of dried fruit arranged on a platter, flowering almond trees and the “seven species”. These are:

- Barley
- Dates
- Figs
- Grapes
- Olives
- Pomegranates
- Wheat

The seven species are associated with the Land of Israel in the Torah so they have an important place in Jewish culture.



Purim

The Jewish people are rescued

Story of Purim



in the Megilla scroll

Purim is one of the most joyous and fun holidays on the **Jewish calendar**. It commemorates a time when the Jewish people living in Persia were saved from extermination.

The Book of Esther

The story of Purim is told in the Biblical book of Esther, with more details and commentary in the Talmud (Megillah). The heroes of the story are Esther, a beautiful young Jewish woman living in Persia, and her cousin Mordecai, who raised her as if she were his daughter. Esther was taken to the house of Ahasuerus, King of Persia, to become part of his harem. King Ahasuerus loved Esther more than his other women and made Esther queen, but the king did not know that Esther was a Jew because Mordecai told her not to reveal her identity.

The villain of the story is Haman, an arrogant, egotistical advisor to the king. Haman hated Mordecai because Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman, so Haman plotted to destroy the Jewish people. In a speech that is all too familiar to Jews, Haman told the king, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your realm. Their laws are different from those of every other people's, and they do not observe the king's laws; therefore it is not befitting the king to tolerate them." *Esther* 3:8. The king gave the fate of the Jewish people to Haman, to do as he pleased to them. Haman planned to exterminate all of the Jews. The word "Purim" means "lots" and refers to the lottery that Haman used to choose the date for the massacre.

Mordecai persuaded Esther to speak to the king on behalf of the Jewish people. This was a dangerous thing for Esther to do, because anyone who came into the king's presence without being summoned could be put to death, and she had not been summoned. Esther fasted for three days to prepare herself, then went into the king. He welcomed her. Later, she told him of Haman's plot against her people. The Jewish people were saved, and Haman and his ten sons were hanged on the gallows that had been prepared for Mordecai.

The book of Esther is unusual in that it is the only book of the Bible that does not contain the name of God. In fact, it includes virtually no reference to God. Mordecai makes a vague reference to the fact that the Jews will be saved by someone else, if not by Esther, but that is the closest the book comes to mentioning God. Thus, one important message that can be gained from the story is that God often works in ways that are not apparent, in ways that appear to be chance, coincidence or ordinary good luck.



Modern Echoes of Purim

The **Pesach (Passover) Seder** reminds us that in every generation, there are those who rise up to destroy the Jewish people, but God saves them from their hand. In the time of the Book of Esther, Haman was the one who tried to destroy the Jews. In modern times, there have been two significant figures who have threatened the Jewish people, and there are echoes of Purim in their stories.

Many have noted the echoes of Purim in the Nuremberg war crime trials. In the Book of Esther, Haman's ten sons were hanged (*Esther 9:13*); in 1946, ten of Hitler's top associates were put to death by hanging for their war crimes, including the crime of murdering 6 million Jews. An 11th associate of Hitler, Hermann Göring, committed suicide the night before the execution, a parallel to the suicide of Haman's daughter recorded in the Talmud (*Megillah 16a*). There are rumors that Göring was a transvestite, making that an even more accurate parallel. One of the men seems to have been aware of the parallel: on the way to the gallows, Julius Streicher shouted "Purim Fest 1946!" See: [The Execution of Nazi War Criminals](#).

Another echo of Purim is found in the Soviet Union a few years later. In early 1953, Stalin was planning to deport most of the Jews in the Soviet Union to Siberia, but just before his plans came to fruition, he suffered a stroke and died a few days later. He suffered that stroke on the night of March 1, 1953, the night after Purim, and his plan to deport Jews was not carried out.

Purim Customs and Observances

Purim is celebrated on the 14th day of Adar, which is usually in March. The 13th of Adar is the day that Haman chose for the extermination of the Jews, and the day that the Jews battled their enemies for their lives. On the day afterwards, the 14th, they celebrated their survival. In cities that were walled in the time of Joshua, Purim is celebrated on the 15th of the month, because the book of Esther says that in Shushan (a walled city), deliverance from the massacre was not complete until the next day. The 15th is referred to as Shushan Purim.

The primary instruction related to Purim is to hear the reading of the book of Esther. God's people are also encouraged to eat, drink and be merry and to send out gifts of food or drink, and to make gifts to charity. A common treat at this time of year is hamantaschen (lit. Haman's pockets). These triangular fruit-filled cookies are supposed to represent Haman's three-cornered hat.

It is customary to hold carnival-like celebrations on Purim, to perform plays and parodies, and to hold beauty contests. In America Purim is sometimes referred to as the Jewish Mardi Gras.

Purim is not subject to the sabbath-like restrictions on work that other holidays are, but some sources recommend not conducting ordinary business on Purim out of respect for the holiday.

Passover פסח and the Seder סדר

A Jewish-Christian Haggadah הגדה



Passover (פסח) is the oldest and most important of Jewish religious festivals, commemorating God's deliverance of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt and his creation of the Israelite people. In its earliest forms it marked the beginning of the Jewish religious year; because of changes in calendars, later Judaism observed the beginning of the year in the Fall with Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashana). It is based on the rituals of ancient Israel preserved primarily in Exodus 12-14 in which Israelites celebrated their deliverance by God from slavery in Egypt. The term Passover refers to the tenth and final plague God brought upon the Egyptians to persuade Pharaoh to let the people go, the death of all the firstborn of Egypt. In obedience to God's instructions, those who believed placed the blood of a lamb on the door posts of their homes, so that God would "pass over" those homes. The festival actually celebrates the entire sequence of events that led to the Israelites' freedom from slavery. While thoroughly based in those historical events, the celebration encompasses much more as it becomes a vehicle to celebrate the very nature of God and His gracious work in the world. It is in this larger dimension that Jesus (ישוע) adopted the Passover service as a sacramental remembrance of God's new work of deliverance in the Christ (המשיח), and allows Christians to celebrate this ancient festival.

The Passover meal is known as the Seder (סדר), which means "order," because the meal and service are done in a prescribed sequence. This sequence is presented in the Haggadah (הגדה or "telling") which outlines the steps of the meal as well as the readings and songs for the participants. While there can be a great deal of variety in how the service is conducted, and so should not be seen as rigidly structured, the basic elements

and order have remained unchanged for centuries. At various points in the service there are different actions required of the participants. All of the actions have carefully composed symbolic meanings, hence the Seder, the order.

Certain aspects of the Passover celebration are clearly outlined in Scripture, including advance preparations, the date and timing of the celebration, certain commemorative symbolic foods to be eaten during the Passover meal, a special “seder” or order to the narrative and ritual recounting of the Passover story. As the years have gone by, the feast has been refined in its structure and form with the elements carefully laid out in a “Haggadah” or storybook such as this one, which outlines the events and activities of the evening celebration.

Jesus was, and is, and always will be a Hebrew man. During His earthly lifetime He was raised up in the Jewish practices and customs of His time and in the precepts of the Old Testament Scriptures. Since He was the living Word of God, His life was a fulfillment of Scripture. As we read in the Gospel accounts of the words and deeds of Jesus’ life, it is striking to note how He became the fulfillment of the Passover, the Paschal Lamb sacrificed for our sins, whose blood was shed that we, placing it over the doorposts of our hearts, might be spared from the Death Angel and enter into eternal life. On the night in which He was betrayed, Jesus celebrated a Passover Seder ceremony with His disciples in an upper room that had been prepared for them. During this special Seder, He took two of the Passover elements, the Aphikomom and the Cup of Elijah, and consecrated them as the Lord’s Supper, the Eucharist that believers have celebrated ever since.

The Seder outlined in this Haggadah is designed for believers both old and new who sense a call to observe the Passover feast as a remembrance of their own passage from bondage to deliverance, from slavery to freedom, through the mercies of the living God and the shed blood of the Paschal Lamb. This blend of tradition and innovation conforms to the purpose of the celebration: to tell the story of God’s actions in history in a way that brings it out of the past and makes it a present reality for everyone in the community, young and old, as if they personally are part of the story. As such, the Passover has been termed one of the most effective teaching tools ever devised, as it appeals to all of the senses and involves everyone to tell the story of God. It represents the very best of communal liturgy. As it has been written in Scripture, “This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as an ordinance forever.” (Exodus 12.14)

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Odd numbered double pages are front sides of sheets, and the following even numbered pages are their respective backs. Pages 1 and 2 are the front and back of the cover, usually printed on heavier stock in blue, followed by the interior pages 3-20. Page 21 is the front of a pale yellow centerfold insert that has a timeline printed on the back which is not currently included (we hope to have it in PDF format soon). When the finished cover, interior pages, and central insert are stacked and center-stapled, a pamphlet is created.

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Shavuot or Pentecost

the Feast of Weeks



Shavuot is the Hebrew word for “weeks” and refers to the Jewish festival (the “Feast of Weeks”) marking the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, which occurs seven weeks after Pesach or *Passover* (to which the Christian community added Easter). Since the counting of this period (sefirat ha-omer) begins on the second evening of Pesach, Shavuot takes place exactly 50 days after the (first) seder. Hence, following the Greek word for “fifty,” Shavuot is often referred to as *Pentecost* and is celebrated as such on the 7th Sunday after Easter in the Christian community.

Origins

Although its origins are to be found in an ancient grain harvest festival, Shavuot has been identified since biblical times in the Jewish community with the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai and in the Christian community with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.



History

Shavuot combines two major religious observances. First is the grain harvest of the early summer. Second is the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai seven weeks after the exodus from Egypt. The first determines the ritual for the holiday, which was one of the three pilgrimage festivals of ancient Israel, when Israelite males were commanded to appear before God in Jerusalem, bringing offerings of the first fruits of their harvest. The second determines the significance of the holiday for Judaism, tying it in with the seminal event of Jewish religious memory, namely the entering into a covenant between God and Israel, exemplified by Israel's assumption of Divine law.

Celebrating in the Community

Much of the observance of the holiday centers on the synagogue and its rituals. The special readings for the holiday include medieval poems (*piyyutim*) and the Book of Ruth. A number of reasons are given for the inclusion of the latter. Among them are that the book takes place at the time of the barley harvest, that Ruth's assumption of Naomi's religion reflects the Israelites' acceptance of the Torah at Sinai, and that King David, who is alleged to have died at this time of year according to rabbinic tradition, is mentioned at the end of Ruth. Another tradition is to participate in a *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*, an all-night study session marking the holiday. And finally, Shavuot is one of the holidays on which both *Hallel*, the Psalms of Praise, is recited and *Yizkor*, the memorial service, is observed.

Celebrating at Home

Since Shavuot is an ancient pilgrimage holiday, it is not surprising that its ritual focuses on the community. Nonetheless, there are a number of customs associated with personal practice. Chief among them is the eating of dairy products on Shavuot. Although the reasons for this custom are not completely clear, it has become traditional to eat milk and cheese products as part of the celebration of Shavuot.

Themes and Theology

By associating an ancient holiday of the grain harvest with the exodus from Egypt, Jewish tradition has imbued Shavuot with religious significance derived from the foundational event in Jewish historical consciousness. In the specific case of Shavuot, this takes the form of the entering into a covenant or formal agreement between God and Israel at Mount Sinai. This is a joyous time, since it is the moment at which God and Israel entered into a figurative marriage with each other, the hopeful springtime of their relationship. It carries the same message to the Christian community as it commemorates the birth of the church through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.