

The Three Feasts in Israel

Main Bible references:

Ex 23
Ex 34
Lev 23
Deut 16:16
2 Chron 8:13

1. **Passover** (feast of unleavened bread): Ex 12, Lev 23, Mt 26:2, Mk 14:1, Lk 22, Jn 13:1, 1 Cor 5:7
2. **Pentecost** (Harvest, First Fruits, Feast of weeks): Ex 23:16, Acts 2:1, Rom 8:23, 1 Cor 15:20, 23, Jms 1:18, Rev 14:4
3. **Tabernacles** (Ingathering): Deut 16:13

From Adam Clarke:

Exo 23:14: Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year - The three feasts here referred to were,

1. The feast of the Passover;
2. The feast of Pentecost;
3. The feast of Tabernacles.

1. The feast of the Passover was celebrated to keep in remembrance the wonderful deliverance of the Hebrews from Egypt.
2. The feast of Pentecost, called also the feast of harvest and the feast of weeks, [Exo 34:22](#), was celebrated fifty days after the Passover to commemorate the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, which took place fifty days after, and hence called by the Greeks Pentecost.
3. The feast of Tabernacles, called also the feast of the ingathering, was celebrated about the 15th of the month Tisri to commemorate the Israelites' dwelling in tents for forty years, during their stay in the wilderness. See on Leviticus 23 (note).

“God, out of his great wisdom,” says Calmet, “appointed several festivals among the Jews for many reasons:

1. To perpetuate the memory of those great events, and the wonders he had wrought for the people; for example, the Sabbath brought to remembrance the creation of the world; the Passover, the departure out of Egypt; the Pentecost, the giving of the law; the feast of Tabernacles, the sojourning of their fathers in the wilderness, etc.
2. To keep them faithful to their religion by appropriate ceremonies, and the splendor of Divine service.
3. To procure them lawful pleasures, and necessary rest.
4. To give them instruction; for in their religious assemblies the law of God was always read and explained.
5. To consolidate their social union, by renewing the acquaintance of their tribes and families; for on these occasions they come together from different parts of the land to the holy city.”

Besides the feasts mentioned above, the Jews had,

1. The feast of the Sabbath, which was a weekly feast.
2. The feast of the Sabbatical Year, which was a septennial feast.
3. The feast of Trumpets, which was celebrated on the first day of what was called their civil year, which was ushered in by the blowing of a trumpet; [Lev 23:24](#), etc.
4. The feast of the New Moon, which was celebrated on the first day the moon appeared after her change.
5. The feast of Expiation, which was celebrated annually on the tenth day of Tisri or September, on which a general atonement was made for all the sins, negligences, and ignorances, throughout the year.
6. The feast of Lots or Purim, to commemorate the preservation of the Jews from the general massacre projected by Haman. See the book of Esther.
7. The feast of the Dedication, or rather the Restoration of the temple, which had been profaned by Antiochus Epiphanes. This was also called the feast of Lights.

Besides these, the Jews have had several other feasts, such as the feast of Branches, to commemorate the taking of Jericho.

- The feast of Collections, on the 10th of September, on which they make contributions for the service of the temple and synagogue.
- The feast for the death of Nicanor. 1 Maccabees 7:48, etc.
- The feast for the discovery of the sacred fire, 2 Maccabees 1:18, etc.
- The feast of the carrying of wood to the temple, called Xylophoria, mentioned by Josephus - War, b. ii. c. 17.

From Matthew Henry:

IV. Their solemn religious attendance on God in the place which he should choose is here strictly required, [Exo 23:14-17](#). 1. Thrice a year all their males must come together in a holy convocation, that they might the better know and love one another, and keep up their communion as a dignified and peculiar people. 2. They must come together *before the Lord* ([Exo 23:17](#)) to present themselves before him, looking towards the place where his honour dwelt, and to pay their homage to him as their great Lord, from and under whom they held all their enjoyments. 3. They must feast together before the Lord, eating and drinking together, in token of their joy in God and their grateful sense of his goodness to them; for *a feast is made for laughter*, [Ecc 10:19](#). O what a good Master do we serve, who has made it our duty to *rejoice before him*, who feasts his servants when they are in waiting! Never let religion be called a melancholy thing, when its solemn services are solemn feasts. 4. They must not *appear before God empty*, [Exo 23:15](#). Some free-will offering or other they must bring, in token of their respect and gratitude to their great benefactor; and, as they were not allowed to come empty-handed, so we must not come to worship God empty-hearted; our souls must be filled with grace, with pious and devout affections, holy desires towards him, and dedications of ourselves to him, for *with such sacrifices God is well-pleased*. 5. The passover, pentecost, and feast of tabernacles, in spring, summer, and autumn, were the three times appointed for their attendance: not in winter, because travelling was then uncomfortable; not in the midst of their harvest, because then they were otherwise employed; so that they had no reason to say that he *made them to serve with an offering*, or *wearied them with incense*.

V. Some particular directions are here given about the three feasts, though not so fully as afterwards. 1. As to the passover, it was not to be offered with leavened bread, for at that feast all leaven was to be cast out, nor was the fat of it to remain until the morning, lest it should become offensive, [Exo 23:18](#). 2. At the feast of pentecost, when they were to begin their harvest, they must bring *the first of their first-fruits* to God, by the pious presenting of which the whole harvest was sanctified, [Exo 23:19](#). 3. At the feast of *ingathering*, as it is called ([Exo 23:16](#)), they must give God thanks for the harvest-mercies they had received, and must depend upon him for the next harvest, and must not think to receive benefit by that superstitious usage of some of the Gentiles, who, it is said, at the end of their harvest, *seethed a kid in its dam's milk*, and sprinkled that milk-pottage, in a magical way, upon their gardens and fields, to make them more fruitful next year. But Israel must abhor such foolish customs.

From John Wesley:

Exo 23:14 The Passover, Pentecost, and feast of Tabernacles, in spring, summer, and autumn, were the three times appointed for their attendance; not in winter, because travelling was then uncomfortable; nor in the midst of their harvest.

From Albert Barnes:

Exo 23:14-17

This is the first mention of the three great Yearly Festivals. The feast of Unleavened bread, in its connection with the Paschal Lamb, is spoken of in Exo. 12; 13: but the two others are here first named. The whole three are spoken of as if they were familiarly known to the people. The points that are especially enjoined are that every male Israelite should attend them at the sanctuary (compare [Exo 34:23](#)), and that he should take with him an offering for Yahweh, presenting himself before his King with his tribute in his hand. That this condition belonged to all the feasts, though it is here stated only in regard to the Passover, cannot be doubted. See [Deu 16:16](#).

From Jamieson, Fausset and Browne:

Exo 23:14-18

Three times ... keep a feast ... in the year — This was the institution of the great religious festivals - “The feast of unleavened bread,” or the passover - “the feast of harvest,” or pentecost - “the feast of ingathering,” or the feast of tabernacles, which was a memorial of the dwelling in booths in the wilderness, and which was observed in the seventh month ([Exo 12:2](#)). All the males were enjoined to repair to the tabernacle and afterwards the temple, and the women frequently went. The institution of this national custom was of the greatest importance in many ways: by keeping up a national sense of religion and a public uniformity in worship, by creating a bond of unity, and also by promoting internal commerce among the people. Though the absence of all the males at these three festivals left the country defenseless, a special promise was given of divine protection, and no incursion of enemies was ever permitted to happen on those occasions.