

**PILGRIMAGE FEASTS**  
**(Personal Teaching Notes)**  
**(Ex. 23:17; 34:23-24; Deut. 16:16-17)**

What I want you to see in this study on Israel's Pilgrimage Feasts is that God has patterns. His ways are not random or haphazard. There are no coincidences with our amazing God. Everything means something, and I believe everything about these feasts points to Him. So, as you study these feasts, look for His patterns, and certainly there are many others not covered here.

There are 7 major Jewish, Biblical feasts. You remember that 7 means complete, and I believe that these feasts are a complete story – again all about Him. These feasts were instituted long ago, so, of course, they are past, but I hope you will also see that they are equally present and future.

Biblical scholars, and particularly Messianic Jewish scholars, teach that Jesus personally fulfilled the first four at His first coming, and that he most assuredly will fulfill the last three at His second coming.

The seven feasts are: (1) PASSOVER\*; (2) Unleavened bread; (3) Firstfruits; (4) SHAVUOT\* (Pentecost); (5) Feast of Trumpets; (6) Yom Kippur and (7) SUKKOT\* (Tabernacles).

The study of Ruth covers the three Pilgrimage Feasts\*: Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot. However, Passover is really three of the seven feasts – it is grouped with Unleavened bread and Firstfruits.

These feasts are called Pilgrimage feasts because a journey to the Temple is required in order to pay tithes and perform certain biblical commands. ALL Jewish males were commanded to make these pilgrimages throughout their generations. I really don't think they minded, though, because this meant they would see family and friends at least three times a year. Also, these are called "feasts", so food and festivities would certainly have been an integral part. Women were certainly encouraged to participate, too, if they didn't have responsibilities at home preventing their going.

I want to show you something I found to be extremely interesting about what God said about the pilgrimage command. Exodus 34:24 states: *For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the Lord thy God thrice in the year.* Today, are Israel's borders being enlarged or shrinking? Does anyone desire her land?

Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot are connected to each other without a break, and because of the specific required offerings, the three are also tied to Israel's agricultural crops.

**Passover (Feast of Unleavened Bread/Firstfruits)** (Ex. 12:1-20,34,39; Ex. 34:26; Lev. 23:4-6,9-11,14; Num. 9:1-14; 28:16-25; Deut. 16:1-8) is the oldest Jewish feast. At the time this feast was instituted, the Hebrew children were instructed to take a lamb, sacrifice it and use its blood to save their own lives, which they did. They were also told to eat only unleavened bread that night and for the next 7 days. The first day of the week (Sunday) after Passover, they crossed the Red Sea and left behind the

conquered, forever-defeated enemy. They were permanently freed from Egyptian bondage.

Note the pattern: they sacrificed the lamb, applied the blood to protect their lives, ate only unleavened bread, and on the first day of the week (Firstfruits), they walked through the Red Sea and emerged free from bondage. (The emerging, victorious Hebrew children were the required Firstfruits wave offering.) The wave offering signifies much more yet to come, and my how their numbers did grow! Now, let's look for that same pattern in the three following time periods.

**Boaz, an observant Jew, assuredly would have observed Passover** by going to the Tabernacle, as required, eaten the Passover lamb, the unleavened bread, and then on the first day of the week, taken his specified sheaf of grain to the Tabernacle for the Priest to wave, grateful that they were no longer under the bondage of famine, and signifying the abundance yet to come.

**Jesus was the perfect Passover lamb.** He went to Jerusalem and ate the Passover lamb with its unleavened bread. He then became the required, blood-atoning sacrificial Passover Lamb, whose blood protected from eternal death and defeated the one holding the world in bondage. He was the unleavened bread – without sin – the bread of life. And, on the Sunday after Passover, He arose from the dead, the Firstfruits wave offering, signifying much more yet to come.

**In Judaism today** families gather in homes to eat the Passover meal – not in Jerusalem (as required) – because there is no Temple standing. They eat unleavened bread, but no longer eat lamb because of the destruction of the Temple. More Jews observe this feast than any of the others. At the end of the Passover seder, they exuberantly proclaim, “Next Year in Jerusalem!” expressing their desire to observe Passover as commanded. They cannot perform the necessary wave offering because of the destruction of the Temple.

**Counting of the Omer** (Lev. 23:15-16; Deut. 16:9; Lev. 23:10-14). Following the wave offering on the Sunday after Passover, there is a counting period for the next 50 days, or 7 weeks. The Counting of the Omer is not a holiday, it is a counting period between the first and second Pilgrimage Feasts (from Passover to Shavuot) during which all grain crops (barley and wheat) are gathered in.

**For the Exodus children**, it was the time when they were learning to walk by faith. God was preparing them to enter into a covenant relationship with Himself. It was their time to distance themselves from their former lives and follow the new leader God set over them. God provided a deliverer – Moses – a man symbolic of the perfect Deliverer who would come some day.

**At the time of Boaz**, we find Ruth learning to walk by faith. It was her time of preparation for entering into a covenant relationship and of distancing herself from her former idol-worshipping, Moabite life. God again provided a deliverer in Boaz, who also foreshadowed the One to come.

**At the time of Jesus**, the counting period began the day of the wave offering (Jesus at His resurrection). It was the time when Jesus made several appearances to His followers giving them final preparations for their new walk of faith, their soon coming covenant relationship and their new “Leader”.

**In present-day Judaism**, this is a time marked on the calendar. Because they desire to teach their children this command, they provide little money boxes for their children to give sacrificially during the counting period, and then at the end, they donate to a charity.

**Shavuot (Pentecost; Feast of Weeks)** (Ex. 23:16a; 34:22a; Lev. 23:15-21; Num. 28:26-31; Deut. 16:9-12; Acts 2:1-4) is Hebrew for “weeks” because it occurs 7 weeks, 50 days, (the Counting of the Omer above) after Passover. This is the second Pilgrimage feast. It is when all the grain crops have been gathered in. A sheaf of grain is the required wave offering at Passover (First Fruits), but on Shavuot two loaves of bread made from the newly harvested grain are the wave offering. Jewish writers compare this holiday to a wedding. Let’s see if we agree.

**Shavuot during the Exodus** is said to have been the time when God gave the Law to Moses. Try and visualize Moses excitedly descending the Mount waving the two Tablets written by the finger of God – the wave offering. The purpose of the Law was to bring Israel into a covenant relationship with Himself. The giving of the Law and their receiving it sealed them in a binding relationship. From that time forward they were known as God’s “Chosen People” – they belonged to Him.

**Shavuot was the time when Boaz** confronted the nearer kinsman-redeemer and took Ruth as his wife in a covenant relationship, sealing her through conception. It was also the time Boaz would have satisfied the command to wave the two loaves of bread before the Lord. Messianic Jews teach that these two loaves represented Naomi and Ruth (Jew and Gentile). Ruth was forever a part of the family of Almighty God.

**Shavuot (Pentecost) during the time of Jesus** found the believers all together in that upper room in Jerusalem, waiting as Jesus had instructed them. You recall how the Holy Spirit came on them as a rushing, mighty wind, sealing them in a covenant relationship by “impregnating” them with the Holy Spirit. The wave offering that day was the Law internalized on the two: the heart and mind (Jer. 31:33). What a joyous wave offering His new Church must have been to the Lord that day!

**In present day Judaism**, Jews celebrate with festive food and stay up all night reading Torah (the celebrated day it was given) and the Book of Ruth for which there is no certain explanation.

**We next come to “the Journey”.** For the Hebrew children we know that their journey lasted 40 years. They could not celebrate the third and final Pilgrimage Feast (Sukkot) until they reached the Promised Land. We also know that they would not reach the Promised Land until all those 20 and above had died because of the evil report about not being able to conquer the land for fear of the enemy (lack of faith in God). Did they know how long their journey would take? No, but they were most assuredly cognizant of the signs. They were waiting on that last person to die. When all had died out but one, how could they not know that the Promised Land was near?

**At the time of Boaz**, the journey took 40 weeks – the time between the promise of the male heir, and the promise received. Did Ruth know how long it would take? Not the day or the hour, but she certainly knew the signs for which to watch. And, as God alone knows the day and hour of a death (above), so also only God knows the day and hour for a birth. The journey for Ruth was the time it took to receive what was promised.

**The time of Jesus** is actually present day. Interestingly, there are some believing and unbelieving Jewish scholars who teach that Messiah will come after 40 Jubilees. (A Jubilee is 50 years.) Do we know the day or hour of His return? Only God knows that. But, we are told that the Church will reach “full term”, and that there will be “birth pains”, so we are to watch for the signs. Full term will usher in the Rapture, when by faith we receive what was promised.

**Present-day Judaism** will overlap **the time of Jesus** (above) – possibly thosesame 40 Jubilees – with each of us anticipating the same Messiah. Orthodox Jews are watching for His “first coming” just as earnestly as evangelical Christians are watching for His “second coming”.

**Sukkot is the last Pilgrimage Feast** (Lev. 23:33-35, 39-43; Num. 29:12-39; Deut. 16:13-17). This is also known as Feast of Tabernacles or Booths or Ingathering. It is the time when all crops have been gathered in – olives, grapes, pomegranates, etc. For the Children of Israel, it could not be properly celebrated until they reached the Promised Land, because the requirement was that for 7 days they would live out under the stars in little booths, or sukkot (or tents), remembering the journey and God’s faithfulness during their wilderness wanderings. The offering required at this feast is a wave offering of many different kinds of fragrant vegetation. It is the happiest celebration of all. The purpose for this feast is to remember the journey and God’s faithfulness.

**For the Hebrew children**, it meant they had finally reached the Promised Land. They received what was promised. They made it; their faith was sight and all were gathered in.

**At the time of Boaz**, Ruth would have delivered the baby – what was promised, and Naomi – by faith – would have taken the “promised” kinsman-redeemer into her bosom. Faith was sight, and all were gathered in – Ruth and Naomi.

**The time of Jesus** is yet future. It will be when we cross the heavenly Jordan into our eternal Promised Land – when we at least receive what was promised. It will be when our faith is sight and when all the children of God are gathered in: Jew and Gentile! I, along with many others, believe that in Heaven we will continue to observe all these feasts, and with this particular one, we will possibly live in temporary dwellings reminiscent of life on earth, remembering our own journey and the faithfulness of Almighty God every step of the way.

**In present-day Judaism** this is an exciting holiday – especially for the children – they get to camp out for a week. They decorate their sukka (singular of sukkot) with all kinds of fragrant produce, possibly family pictures and holiday lights. Since the purpose of this feast is to remember the journey, the father will tell the Exodus story over and over to his children because they must never forget. Many sleep and take all their meals in their “temporary home” for the week. Then, on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, they have a holy celebration at the synagogue where the last chapter of the Law (Torah) is read, followed immediately by the first chapter, and the cycle begins all over again.