

LEVITICUS 23V23-44

THE AUTUMN FESTIVALS

The final three festivals of the religious year all took place in the seventh month (Tishri) at the turning of the year - the autumn equinox.

1. Feast of Trumpets v23-25

The autumnal festivals began with this Feast of Trumpets. It occurs on the opening day of the "seventh month". This is the most sacred and most festive month in the Jewish calendar. This date marks the end of the agricultural year and the beginning of the next one. That is why since the time of the Old Testament period and the New the Jews have celebrated this day as New Years Day (Rosh Hashana), announcing it with blasts from the ram's horn.

Spiritual significance

The trumpet blasts announced the beginning of the holy month and summoned the people to make their special offerings and to prepare themselves for the solemn Day of Atonement and the final great festival of joy. The blasts are also a reminder, or "memorial", in that they signal to God on Israel's behalf that He would remember His covenant with them and continue to be favourable towards them. It also reminded the people of their responsibilities towards Him.

2. Day of Atonement v26-32

On the tenth day of the holy month the people were to keep the "Day of Atonement" (Yom Kippur). The day has been mentioned in Lev 16, where we find all the details. Here the focus falls on the responsibility of the people to afflict themselves (23v27,29,32). This involved going without food and expressing signs of mourning. "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted" (Matt 5v4).

3. Feast of Tabernacles v33-43

The "Feast of Tabernacles", or Booths (Sukkoth) is the third annual pilgrimage festival and brings to a grand finale all the other events of the year. It began on the 15th day of the holy month and lasted for seven days.

Spiritual significance

The festival was called "Tabernacles" or "Booths" because the Israelites were directed to make temporary booths out of tree branches and to live in them during the festive week. It was to remind the nation of its beginnings, when the first generation left Egypt and lived a nomadic life in make shift shelters (23v42,43). It is an important reminder that we are called to be a pilgrim people.

The other name for this pilgrim festival is "Feast of Ingathering" (Ex 23v16,34v12), for it was the time when the remainder of the harvest, such as the olives and grapes have been gathered in (Deut 16v14,15). It was a time of great rejoicing in God's wonderful provision. Whereas all the other festivals have been fulfilled with the coming of Christ and the Spirit, the feast of "Ingathering" awaits fulfilment. It anticipated the future harvest home when all of the elect have been gathered in, to enjoy the eternal state of blessedness in the new creation (Matt 3v12, Rev 21v3,4).