



ISRAEL'S MAJOR HOLIDAYS

By Julie Stahl

CBN
ISRAEL



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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

We are delighted to provide you this Christian guide to the Jewish and Israeli holidays.

At CBN Israel, we believe it is absolutely essential for Christians to stand with Israel and bless the Jewish people. One significant way we can do that is by exploring the holidays and customs that are so central to Jewish life and culture.

This booklet has been written specifically for Christians and is meant to give you an overview of the major holidays. You will discover which holidays we can trace back to the Bible, the rich Jewish tradition associated with these holidays, and the profound significance of these events to followers of our Jewish Messiah, Jesus.

In addition to the biblical Jewish feasts and festivals, there are other holidays that have been included in this guide: Purim, the holiday that celebrates God's deliverance as recorded in the Book of Esther, Holocaust Remembrance Day, Israel's Memorial and Independence Days, Hanukkah, and others.

We have also included a handful of delicious recipes, because after all what is a holiday without food?

This special guide is intended to provide you with an open door through which you can enter and begin exploring the holidays. So, come on in...

SABBATH (SHABBAT)

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy: You are to labor six days and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to

the LORD your God. You must not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the foreigner who is within your gates. For the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything in them in six days; then He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and declared it holy” (Exodus 20:8-11 NKJV).

Some call the Sabbath a “Sanctuary in Time.” God instituted the concept way back in Genesis 2:2-3 at the end of His creation story: *On the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made (NKJV).*

Later, He gave it as the fourth of the Ten Commandments to the Jewish people in Exodus 20:8-10, “*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy: You are to labor six days and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God” (NKJV).*

It was meant to bless mankind. In this age of technology and fast transport can you imagine how crazy we would be if we didn’t have the concept of taking a day off each week? And, of course, at the foundation of that is keeping the day to honor God.

In Israel, the Sabbath, or *Shabbat*, begins shortly before sundown on Friday and ends about an hour after sundown on Saturday. For Orthodox Jews here in Israel, it’s a time of going to the synagogue, praying, resting, and being with family and friends. They go to pray on Friday evening, Shabbat morning and at the end of the Sabbath.

Just before Shabbat begins, work in the home ends and

the woman of the house lights two candles and blesses the Lord. “Blessed are You, oh Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us by Your commandments, and commanded us to light the Sabbath lights.”

An alternative prayer used by those who believe in Jesus could be: “Blessed are You, oh Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us by Your Word, given us Jesus as the Messiah and commanded us to be a light unto the world.”

Following Friday evening prayers, many Jewish people (even those who do not go to synagogue) gather together for an *Erev Shabbat* (“Sabbath eve”) meal with family and friends. At Orthodox (and other) celebrations, the verses from Genesis about the seventh day are read and recited, the blessing over the wine and the special hallah bread are said, and the man of the house blesses his wife and children.

Two loaves of hallah bread are placed on the table to represent the double portion of manna God gave the children of Israel on the sixth day while they were in the wilderness, so they would not have to work on the Sabbath.

Every week, there is a Torah portion—a scheduled reading of the Torah (the five books of Moses, or the first five books of the Bible—along with a related reading from the prophets or other writings in the Old Testament. This reading schedule takes them through the Torah each year.

Because of the prohibition against work and lighting a fire on the Sabbath (Exodus 35:3), Orthodox Jews do not drive, and they do not venture more than about a half-mile from home. Food is prepared in advance of the Sabbath and many times kept warm on a special hot plate until

Saturday. They do not spend money on the Sabbath, so they also will not go to restaurants (many of which are not open in Israel).

In most Israeli cities, buses and trains stop running, although taxis are always available. Most shops, grocery stores, malls, and offices close by mid-afternoon on Friday. Many only reopen Sunday morning. Decades ago, there were laws in Israel forbidding businesses, restaurants, and places of entertainment to open on Shabbat but due to high demand from non-religious Jews, allowances have been made.

The Sabbath is mentioned many times in the New Testament. Jesus says that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. He also says that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:10-12).

Most likely in the first century, Christians began to hold their worship services on Sunday—the first day of the week—to celebrate Jesus’ resurrection on that day.

GREETING

Shabbat Shalom! (“Sabbath Peace!”)

SPELT HALLAH

(Makes 3 large loaves or 4 smaller ones)

INGREDIENTS

2 cups spelt flour	water
2 cups rye flour	3 eggs
3 cups white flour (at least)	½ cup oil
1 level tbsp salt	1 cup silan (or honey)
2 tbsp dry yeast	Seeds of your choice
2–2½ cups of lukewarm	

PREPARATION

- Mix the spelt and rye flours in a large bowl, then add salt and yeast. In a different bowl mix together the honey, two eggs, oil, and water (start with 2 cups water). Add honey mixture to flour mixture. Gradually add the rest of the flour.
- Put on a floured board or counter and knead for 10 minutes or until batter is smooth and elastic. Add flour to the board (counter) as necessary; work into the dough as you knead. Stretch a small part of dough to test if it is done. If the dough stretches and does not break, you may let it rise. If not, knead the dough a little bit longer. If the dough is too wet and breaks easily, add a very small amount of the flour gradually. If it's too dry, add a little water and knead again.

- Oil a large bowl and place the dough in it, turning the dough once to make sure it is completely oiled. Place in the refrigerator in a covered bowl overnight or leave to rise, covered, in a warm place out of any drafts for two hours.
- In the morning, remove dough from the refrigerator. On a lightly floured work surface, flatten the dough and separate into three or four equal parts; roll each part into a sausage-like shape. Braid the hallah and place on a lined baking sheet. Brush the hallah with oil. Cover with a damp kitchen towel, and let it rise for 30-40 minutes or until the hallah is double in size. (I usually oil the top of the hallah before I let it rise the second time.)
- Before baking, brush the bread with an egg (add small amount of water with the egg and whisk it up first) and sprinkle with sesame or poppy seeds, nuts, oats, or any seeds you choose (sesame and nigella seeds). Heat the oven to 400° F. Bake the bread for 5 minutes, then lower heat to 340° F and bake another 20 minutes.

ROSH HASHANAH: FEAST OF TRUMPETS

“Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. On the first day of the appointed month in early autumn, you are to observe a day of complete rest. It will be an official day for holy assembly, a day commemorated with loud blasts of a trumpet. You must do no ordinary work on that day. Instead, you are to present special gifts to the LORD” (Leviticus 23:23-25 NLT).

Rosh Hashanah literally means the “head of the year”—the new year. But biblically it’s much more than that. In the book of Leviticus in Hebrew it’s called *Yom Hateruah*—the day of the blowing of trumpets or ram’s horn (*shofar*)—the judgment day.

The piercing blast of the shofar is meant to remind the hearer to repent for his sins and make things right with his brothers and sisters. The rabbis say that reconciliation with God and man will confound the enemy.

“It’s something that people connect to their soul to hear the sound of the shofar,” says Eli Ribak, third-generation shofar maker.

The ram’s horn is used as the traditional shofar because when Abraham showed his willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac, God provided a ram in the thicket to be used in his place.

The only animal horn that is forbidden to use as a shofar is the cow’s horn. That’s because the Jewish people don’t want to remind God of the time Israel worshipped the golden calf in the wilderness.

In some traditions, the shofar is blown in synagogues and at the Western Wall each morning for a month before

the holiday to give plenty of time for repentance.

Traditionally, Rosh Hashanah is a celebration of creation, specifically the day God created Adam and Eve. As such, God the Creator is hailed and crowned as “our King” on that day.

Christians often blow the shofar throughout the year, but in Judaism it’s only blown during the month of Elul, prior to Rosh Hashanah and at the holiday. It was also blown at the coronation of the kings of Israel, to announce the new king or the coming of the king.

Boaz Michael, founder of First Fruits of Zion, says that’s a foreshadowing for those who believe in Jesus.

“And they tell us something, they’re speaking to us, they’re reminding us of something, and one of the things they’re reminding us of is the creation of the world, the coming of the king, King Messiah one day at this time, the coronation of his Kingdom here on earth,” says Michael. “This is what the shofar is to remind us of, and it speaks to us every day when we hear that sound.”

For Christians, there are a number of references in the New Testament referring to the sounding of trumpets.

“And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:31 NKJV).

Paul writes, *It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed* (1 Corinthians 15:52 NLT).

The seven trumpets in Revelation also make clear they play a part in the end time calling.

Rosh Hashanah is celebrated for two days and begins the autumn biblical holiday cycle.

A festive meal at the start of the holiday includes eating apples dipped in honey for a sweet new year; dates, that our enemies would be consumed; pomegranate seeds, that we would bear much fruit; eating round *hallah*, symbolizing the circle of life and the crown of God's Kingship; and eating a fish or ram's head, symbolic of being the head and not the tail in the year to come.

Another custom is called *Tashlich*, which literally means "to cast away" or "to throw away." This concept comes from Micah 7:19 (NKJV): *He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.*

This is a time of reflection to think about and repent for sins of the previous year and to determine how one could do better in the coming year. During this ceremony, Jewish people stand by a body of water and symbolically cast their sins into the water.

HOLIDAY GREETING

L'Shanah Tovah U'metuka

("May you have a good and sweet new year!")

or *Chag Sameach* ("Happy holiday!")

YOM KIPPUR: DAY OF ATONEMENT

“Be careful to celebrate the Day of Atonement on the tenth day of that same month—nine days after the Festival of Trumpets. You must observe it as an official day for holy assembly, a day to deny yourselves and present special gifts to the LORD” (Leviticus 23:27 NLT).

Yom Kippur is the Holiest Day in the Jewish year, the “Day of Atonement.”

The 10 days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are known as the “Ten Days of Awe.” This is your chance, so to speak, to get your heart and relationships right before Yom Kippur. According to Jewish tradition, this is the time that one’s name is either inscribed or not in the Book of Life for another year.

“These are heavy, heavy days of repentance, reflection, and seeking God’s face as we prepare to go stand before Him in a state of fasting, a state of humility on the day of Yom Kippur,” says Boaz Michael, founder of First Fruits of Zion.

In some traditions, worshippers pray *Selichot* or *slichot* prayers (“forgiveness”) as much as a month before Rosh Hashanah to make sure they are prepared for that day.

“The Bible speaks about Yom Kippur in terms of being a great day of judgment, of us standing before God. It’s traditionally, according to a Jewish perspective, a time in which we will literally be standing before the Father on that Day of Judgment,” says Michael.

It’s customary to wear white on this day. In some traditions, men wear a white robe or, in Yiddish, *kittel*. That tradition comes from Isaiah 1:18 (NLT), where God says, “Come now, let’s settle this. ... Though your sins are like scarlet,

I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool.”

Yom Kippur has five prayer services throughout the day, which is more than any other Jewish holiday.

“The *Viddui* is the central prayer of confession and forgiveness of the Jewish people on Yom Kippur. And it’s a prayer that they pray not only on behalf of themselves but on behalf of all the Jewish people around the world,” says Reverend David Pileggi of Christ Church in Jerusalem’s Old City.

He says that the *Viddui* prayer recognizes the words of Jeremiah: “*The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?*” (Jeremiah 17:9 NLT).

“One thing we learn from the Jewish people about Yom Kippur is that it’s not enough to say you’re sorry. You have to confess, say you’re sorry, and then at the same time take practical steps to change your behavior,” says Pileggi.

He says there’s a parallel between Yom Kippur and the teachings of Jesus.

“We have a saying of Jesus, don’t we? It says, if you bring your gift to the altar and your brother has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and go and be reconciled with your brother. Jewish tradition says, to go get your relationship right with your neighbor, with your brother, with your family member, forgive and be reconciled and then on the Day of Atonement, when you begin to fast and pray and to confess, God will hear your prayer and forgive you as you have forgiven others,” says Pileggi.

“It’s the teaching of Jesus and it’s also something that’s

part and parcel of Jewish tradition and here the two line up very nicely,” Pileggi adds.

In the synagogue, the Book of Jonah is read.

“Jonah is a symbol of repentance. He’s commanded by God to call the people of Nineveh to repent, but he himself was struggling through his own reflections about who receives God’s judgment and who receives God’s mercy,” says Michael.

“So, Jonah can so often symbolize our own actions—doubting God, disobeying God, and determining who’s worthy of His redemption. But, like Jonah, we’re invited to repent of our disobedience and prejudices so that we can rejoin God in building His kingdom,” Michael adds.

He affirms that Yom Kippur holds a deep meaning even for those who believe in Jesus.

“It’s through the work of Messiah that our sins are taken away. He is our great atonement. I think this is a beautiful biblical understanding for us to affirm and hold onto in the context of our daily lives, but at the same time, we also need to be reminded to live a life of repentance,” Michael concludes.

GREETING

G’mar Chatimah Tovah

(“May you be sealed for good in the Book of Life”)

and *Tzom Kal*

(which is used to wish others an “easy fast”)

SUKKOT: FEAST OF TABERNACLES

“On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the LORD’s Festival of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days. The first day is a sacred assembly; do no regular work. For seven days present food offerings to the LORD, and on the eighth day hold a sacred assembly and present a food offering to the LORD. It is the closing special assembly; do no regular work” (Leviticus 23:34-36 NIV).

Some call this holiday a Jewish camping trip with the conveniences of home. It’s an ancient biblical command that’s still being kept today and it begins just four days after Yom Kippur. For thousands of years, Jewish people around the world have followed the biblical injunction to live in temporary dwellings during the week-long Feast of Tabernacles or *Sukkot*.

“It helps us remember,” says Israeli Seth Ben-Haim. “First of all, we’re commanded to remember the Exodus from Egypt and how we needed to wander through the desert for forty years without permanent dwellings, but it also reminds us that even though we’ve been brought into the land of Israel, we haven’t reached our final destination,” he says.

Sukkot is one of the three pilgrimage festivals, when Jewish people were commanded to go up to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem to worship.

For seven days, families eat, sleep, study, and pray in the *sukkah* or “booth.” Rabbis say it must have at least three sides and the roof must be made in such a way that the stars are visible through it at night and it’s open to the elements. Most people use either palm fronds or a straw

mat for the roof. And many are decorated at least in part by the children.

“Otherwise, we’d be in the protection of our homes and the purpose of living temporarily in this flimsy tabernacle is so that we can remember that ultimately we’re under HaShem’s [God’s] protection,” says Ben-Haim.

Another part of the Sukkot celebration is recorded in Leviticus 23:40 (NLT), where the Bible commands the Israelites to take four species of fruit from beautiful trees—a citron or *Etrog*, a palm branch, a bough of leafy trees (myrtle), and a willow branch and “*celebrate with joy before the LORD your God for seven days.*”

Great care is taken to choose an *Etrog* without a blemish but with many bumps. During morning prayers each day, Jewish men wave the *Lulav* (the three branches) and *Etrog* before the Lord.

“We wave them in many different directions, and we really look above and that’s what this type of roof helps us to remember. We’re looking above because that’s where our help is going to come from,” says Ben-Haim.

The New Testament records that Jesus went up to Jerusalem at the Feast: *The Jewish Festival of Tabernacles was near, so His brothers said to Him, “Leave here and go to Judea so Your disciples can see Your works that You are doing.” ... When the festival was already half over, Jesus went up into the temple complex and began to teach* (John 7:2-3, 14 HCSB).

For Christians (actually the whole world), the Feast of Tabernacles has prophetic significance. In the book of Zechariah, the prophet says that one day all nations will come up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast.

Since 1980, thousands of Christians from around the

world have come up to Jerusalem every year to see prophecy fulfilled and to celebrate at the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem's Feast of Tabernacles event. Other Christian ministries also hold Feast celebrations now.

“They're following the invitation of Zechariah 14, where it says that one day all the nations will come up to celebrate this biblical feast here in Jerusalem, to worship the Lord and keep the Feast of Tabernacles. Our showing up here now for this feast is a statement of faith that there's coming a day when the Messiah will rule here,” says David Parsons, ICEJ spokesman.

Zechariah 14:16-18 says, In the end, the enemies of Jerusalem who survive the plague will go up to Jerusalem each year to worship the King, the LORD of Heaven's Armies, and to celebrate the [Feast of Tabernacles]. Any nation in the world that refuses to come to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of Heaven's Armies, will have no rain. If the people of Egypt refuse to attend the festival, the LORD will punish them with the same plague that he sends on the other nations who refuse to go (NLT).

HOLIDAY GREETING

Hag Sameach (“Happy Holiday!”)
and during the intermediate days,

Moadim L'Simcha (“a joyful holiday!”)

SEVEN SPECIES OR SHIVAT HAMINIM SALAD

INGREDIENTS

3 cups cooked barley or Israeli couscous	2 tbsp honey
¼ cup dried figs, chopped, or 3 fresh figs, quartered	2 tbsp red wine vinegar
¼ cup pitted dates, sliced in rings or chopped	1 tbsp country Dijon mustard
¼ cup seedless grapes, halved	¼ cup wheat and barley nuggets cereal (such as Grape-Nuts®)
¼ cup pomegranate seeds	2 tbsp parsley leaves, torn
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil	

PREPARATION

- Combine barley, figs, dates, grapes, and pomegranate seeds in large bowl.
- Place oil, honey, vinegar, and mustard in a small bowl and whisk to combine. Pour dressing over barley salad and toss to coat well.
- Just before serving, add cereal and toss to evenly distribute. Garnish with parsley leaves.

SIMCHAT TORAH: CELEBRATING THE TORAH

“For seven days you must present special gifts to the LORD. The eighth day is another holy day on which you present your special gifts to the LORD. This will be a solemn occasion, and no ordinary work may be done that day” (Leviticus 23:36 NLT).

On the day following the seven days of Sukkot, *Simchat Torah* is celebrated, which literally means, “rejoicing with the Torah.” The Bible says on that day to have another “holy convocation” on which sacrifices are offered to the Lord and no work is permitted.

“Although it focuses on the Torah [the five books of Moses], Simchat Torah is, ironically, not a holiday found in Scripture itself,” says Rabbi Welton. Instead, it’s blended with *Shemini Atzeret* (“the eighth day of assembly”).

Every year, synagogues read through the entire Torah in designated weekly portions. The yearly reading cycle ends with Deuteronomy and begins again in Genesis on the day of Simchat Torah.

“We read the Torah in a continuous cycle, because the circle is both a symbol of eternity and equality. Just as God is eternal, the Torah is also eternal. Just as God created all humanity in His image, we too must treat all humanity accordingly,” Rabbi Welton says.

“There’s an ancient Jewish custom to dance for hours around the *bima* (“lectern”) on Simchat Torah in a circle symbolizing the eternity of the Torah and its Author,” he adds. It’s also common in Israel for many to dance in the streets.

In Israel, both Simchat Torah and Shemini Atzeret are

celebrated on the same day, while outside of Israel in the Diaspora, they are celebrated as two days—first Shemini Atzeret, then Simchat Torah.

According to Rabbi Welton, Simchat Torah is not mentioned in the Talmud and only appears during the Middle Ages in historical contexts.

YOM HAALİYAH: IMMIGRATION TO ISRAEL

“For I will gather you up from all the nations and bring you home again to your land. ... And you will live in Israel, the land I gave your ancestors long ago. You will be my people, and I will be your God” (Ezekiel 36:24, 28 NLT).

They come from all over the world to a place many have never been before. Yet the Jewish people have longed to return to this land for thousands of years.

“For almost 3,000 years we were disconnected, but we were praying for Jerusalem,” says Natan Sharansky, former head of the Jewish Agency, the quasi-governmental organization that handles immigration. “So it’s really encouraging to see gathering of the exiles to Israel, and it continues every day.”

Nearly 70 years before the modern State of Israel was reestablished, the Jewish people began to return to their ancient homeland as the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel had foretold.

Today, it’s called *Aliyah* (literally “going up”). Taken from biblical times, the term describes when the Jewish people went up to Jerusalem to worship at the Temple. Now, it has taken on the meaning of immigrating or

returning to the land of Israel.

In their own words, here is why some young professionals from around the world said they decided to come:

“I’m here because I love Israel,” says Dilan from Uruguay.

“I love Israel,” says Nikita, who studied nuclear physics, from Russia.

“I’m here because it’s the only Jewish state there is,” says Gadi, a successful lawyer from New York.

“I came to Israel because I feel like it’s the homeland of the Jewish people, and for the first time in 2,000 years we have our own homeland. And we could build a prosperous Jewish state. I think that’s very exciting to be a part of,” says Shimon, who is from England and Australia.

“It’s the land of the Jewish people and that’s why I’m here. I wanted to essentially come home and to be with my fellow Jews and to—please God—find a Jewish husband,” says Teren, a fashion designer from South Africa.

Yom HaAliyah is a day designated to celebrate the continuing Jewish immigration to Israel and acknowledge the ongoing contribution of *olim* (“immigrants”) to the Jewish state. Since Israel was reestablished, the Jewish Agency has brought more than 3.5 million immigrants home to the land.

It’s actually marked twice in the year, once as a national holiday and then when children observe the day at school—about six-and-a-half months later. One of those days is believed to be the anniversary of Joshua crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land.

Sharansky, who made headlines in the 1980s as a political prisoner in the former Soviet Union, immigrated

to Israel in 1986 after international pressure led to his release.

“I meet with a lot of new immigrants, and I love to be in the airport to see the moment when they’re coming down from the airplane. For each of these people, there are at least 50 generations of Jews who were praying and dreaming about coming to Jerusalem, and each of these new immigrants are closing a huge circle after thousands of years of exile,” Sharansky said.

A number of organizations like the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ), Ebenezer Operation Exodus, Return Ministries, and the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews (IFCJ) have worked for decades to assist Jewish people in returning to the land of Israel. Others, like CBN Israel, provide vital assistance after they arrive.

Although they’re part of a prophetic and exciting journey, many immigrants face a whole new world when they arrive. They’ve left families, friends, jobs, and cultures behind to start a new life in a new land, in a new culture, and speaking a new language.

Another group, *Nefesh B’Nefesh* (“Jewish Souls United”) helps Jews from the U.S., Canada, and U.K. to make Aliyah. Since the group started in 2002, they have helped more than 60,000 Jews immigrate to Israel by simplifying the Aliyah process, removing professional, logistical, and financial obstacles.

“We don’t want the immigration from America to be an Aliyah of necessity—distress, duress, persecution, or running away from something. You don’t want that. The beauty of North American immigration is that people are gladly choosing Aliyah,” says Rabbi Yehoshua Fass, co-founder of *Nefesh B’Nefesh*.

Seeing Jewish people return to the land of Israel is literally watching Bible prophecy unfold before your eyes. And God promises that they'll never be uprooted again:

"I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them. I will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them"
(Amos 9:14-15 NKJV).

HANUKKAH: FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

It was now winter, and Jesus was in Jerusalem at the time of Hanukkah, the Festival of Dedication. He was in the Temple, walking through the section known as Solomon's Colonnade
(John 10:22-23 NLT).

For eight days Jewish people around the world celebrate *Hanukkah*, a holiday marking a great victory over 2,000 years ago.

"This is a holiday about spirituality, this is a holiday about values, this is a holiday about connecting to God," says Rebecca Spiro, a Jerusalem Old City resident.

Also known as the Festival of Lights or the Feast of Dedication, Hanukkah is not mentioned in the Old Testament, but it is in the New Testament.

"It's a holiday that celebrates religious freedom and our victory against oppression and our ability to rededicate the Temple," says Spiro.

In the second century B.C., the Jewish people in Judea revolted against the Syrian-Greek (Seleucid) conquerors.

The Syrian-Greek king, Antiochus IV, ruled over Israel in 174 B.C. He began to unify his kingdom by imposing pagan religion and culture on the Jews—forcing them to eat pork and forbidding Sabbath observance, Bible (Torah) study, and circumcision. Worse still, the Seleucids defiled the Temple in Jerusalem and dedicated it to the Greek god Zeus.

Mattathias, a sage from the village of Modi'in, and his five sons took a stand against the prohibitions and idolatry and fled to the hills of Judea. There they raised a small army and engaged in guerilla warfare against the Seleucid Empire.

Before his death, Mattathias appointed his son Judah the Strong as their leader. Judah was called “Maccabee,” a word composed of the initial letters of the four Hebrew words, *Mi Kamocha Ba'eilim Adonai*, which means, “Who is like You, O God?”

King Antiochus sent his General Apollonius to wipe out Judah and his followers, but he was defeated. So he sent tens of thousands more soldiers to fight. The Maccabees responded by declaring, “Let us fight unto death in defense of our souls and our Temple!” They assembled in Mitzpah, where Samuel, the prophet, had prayed to God.

Although they were greatly outnumbered, the Maccabees won and returned to Jerusalem to liberate and cleanse the Holy Temple from the idols that Antiochus had placed inside.

On the 25th day of the month of Kislev, in the year 139 B.C., the Maccabees rededicated the Temple in Jerusalem. Legend says there was only enough sacred oil for the *menorah* (“candelabrum” with seven branches used in the Temple in Jerusalem) to burn for one day, but when they lit it, it miraculously burned for eight days—enough time to purify more oil. That’s why Hanukkah lasts for eight days.

The Maccabees were also important in early Christianity. Recently, archaeologists uncovered tombs believed to be those of the Hasmoneans about a mile from the modern Israeli city of Modiin and about 20 miles from Jerusalem in the area where the Maccabees would have lived.

At the site, there was a mosaic floor with a cross on it. Archaeologists suggest that Byzantine Christians found the original tomb and decorated it with the mosaic.

“The Maccabees were Jewish leaders, Jewish rebels. They removed the Greek empire and Greek presence from what is now modern Israel, and they established an independent Jewish state, which makes it significant to both Judaism and Christianity,” says archaeologist Dan Shachar.

Another indication of their importance to early Christians is that the books of the Maccabees are part of the Apocryphal books, canonized as part of the Catholic and Greek Orthodox Bibles but not part of the Jewish or other Christian Bibles.

Today, Jewish people light a special Hanukkah menorah, called a *Hanukkiah*, with nine branches—one for each of the eight days and an additional one called the *shamash* or “servant candle” used to light the others. Each day an additional candle is lit, so that by the eighth day they are all ablaze.

Because of the oil, eating delicious fried foods like *latkes* (“potato pancakes”) and *soufganiot* (“jelly donuts”) is another Hanukkah tradition.

Hanukkah falls around and sometimes coincides with Christmas time. Children are often given presents each day of the holiday.

Spiro says there’s a message in the holiday for today.

“The world’s coming up against Israel. The wolves are circling the sheep. This is nothing new, and the message for Hanukkah is no matter what happens our candles burn bright,” she says. “Civilizations have come and gone, but the Jewish people are still here.”

TU B’SHVAT: CELEBRATING NATURE

“When you enter the land and plant fruit trees, leave the fruit unharvested for the first three years and consider it forbidden. Do not eat it” (Leviticus 19:23 NLT).

Tu B’Shvat is also known as *Rosh HaShanah La’Ilanot*, the New Year of the Trees.

Israel actually has four “new year’s days” each year.

The first of these is the biblical New Year in the spring, just before Passover, on the first of the Hebrew month of Nisan. It determines the pilgrimage festivals and other biblical holidays. In biblical times, it also determined the reign of the kings.

The second “new year” is on the first of Elul and is the beginning of the year for tithing livestock.

The third “new year” is in the early autumn, on the first of Tishrei at Rosh Hashanah (the Feast of Trumpets). That is used for counting years—sabbatical and jubilee years—and for planting.

Then there’s Tu B’Shvat, the fourth New Year. Celebrated in late January or early February, it’s the beginning of the year for counting the age of trees. That is important because the Bible says not to eat the fruit of a tree for the

first three years.

Today in Israel, Tu B'Shvat is celebrated as a kind of Arbor Day or ecological holiday. One of the main traditions on this day is to plant trees.

In 1901, the Fifth Zionist Congress in Basel decided to establish Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael-Jewish National Fund (KKL-JNF) in order to purchase land in what was then called Ottoman Turkish Palestine. But there was more.

“We must establish a national forestry society for the planting of trees in the land,” said Johann Kremenetzky, the first chairman of the KKL-JNF. Within their first decade they had planted their first forest.

From the very beginning to the end, trees hold a special metaphorical significance in the Bible. In Genesis 2:9, we are introduced to the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Then, in Revelation 22:14, we see the Tree of Life again—as well as multiple times in between.

According to Rabbi Welsh, Tu B'Shvat also has a “special significance” because man is compared in the Bible to the “tree of the field.”

In Psalm 1:3 (NIV), we are told that the man who delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on the word of God shall be *like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.*

And again, in Psalm 92:12 (NIV), *The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon.*

Again and again in Scripture, God uses trees to speak to us. In honor of the trees, on Tu B'Shvat fruits of the seven

species are eaten from Deuteronomy 8:8—olives, dates, pomegranates, figs and grapes, as well as other dried fruits.

PURIM: STORY OF ESTHER

Mordecai recorded these events and sent letters to all the Jews in all of King Ahasuerus's provinces, both near and far. He ordered them to celebrate the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month Adar every year because during those days the Jews got rid of their enemies. That was the month when their sorrow was turned into rejoicing and their mourning into a holiday. ... For Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them. He cast the Pur (that is, the lot) to crush and destroy them. But when the matter was brought before the king, he commanded by letter that the evil plan Haman had devised against the Jews return on his own head and that he should be hanged with his sons on the gallows. For this reason these days are called Purim, from the word Pur (Esther 9:20-22, 24-26 HCSB).

Purim celebrates the Jewish people's rescue from and victory over a wicked government minister who wanted to destroy them thousands of years ago as recorded in the book of Esther in the Bible. And although it's the only book in the Bible where the name of God is not mentioned at all, His fingerprints are all over it!

“The book of Esther is kind of about the end of the world—Jerusalem's destroyed, there are no more prophets, God has stopped speaking to people, and you can't see Him anywhere. The kingdom is gone, the armies are gone, the glory that was Jerusalem and Israel is gone, and the

Jews are scattered throughout the Persian Empire,” says Yoram Hazony, author of *God and Politics in Esther*.

Haman—an evil advisor to King Ahasueres (Xerxes) with a desire to wipe out the Jewish people—conspired to kill the entire Jewish population throughout the ancient Kingdom of Persia (modern-day Iran) on a single day. Since the King trusted Haman, he agreed.

But, unknown to the King, his beloved Queen Esther was Jewish. She and her cousin Mordechai exposed the plot and turned the tables. So the Jews were rescued and instead became victorious over their enemies. This is what we celebrate at Purim.

Hazony says there’s a deep lesson here.

“We all like favor, we all like political favor; we love it when people love us and Esther does, too. She loves being queen,” says Hazony. “But the question is when it comes down to it and you need to do something to throw away that favor, throw away political favor in order to do the right thing, do you have it in you?”

At the Western Wall and in synagogues in Israel and around the world, *Megillat Esther*, or the scroll of the Book of Esther, is read on Purim. But this reading is unlike any other. Parents and children dress up in costumes. At one time, this ritual was to imitate the biblical characters, but now it includes popular costumes, too. They cheer when the names of heroes Mordechai and Esther are read—and boo and use noise makers when the name of Haman, the villain of the story, is mentioned.

According to Rabbi Welton, there are two possible reasons for the costumes: to symbolize how Esther

concealed her identity until the last moment or how God was a “concealed force behind the salvation of the Jews.”

Sending financial gifts to the poor and food gifts to others are traditions. Some Jews have a Purim feast. A special treat called *hamentaschen* (“Haman’s hat” in Yiddish) or *oznei Haman* (“Haman’s ears” in Hebrew) is a triangular cookie filled with dates, chocolate or nuts eaten at the holiday.

In most Jewish communities, the holiday is celebrated on the 14th of Adar, but in walled cities or those that were at one time like Jerusalem, the holiday is celebrated a day later and known as Shushan Purim.

Hazon summed up Purim like this: “The Persian Empire. One Jewish Woman. Guess Who Wins?”

GREETING

Hag Purim Sameach! (“Happy Purim!”)

PESACH (PASSOVER): FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

“The LORD’s Passover begins at sundown on the fourteenth day of the first month. On the next day, the fifteenth day of the month, you must begin celebrating the Festival of Unleavened Bread. This festival to the LORD continues for seven days, and during that time the bread you eat must be made without yeast. On the first day of the festival, all the people must stop their ordinary work and observe an official day for holy assembly. For seven days you must present special gifts to the LORD. On the seventh day the people must again stop all their ordinary work to observe an official day for holy assembly” (Leviticus 23:5-8 NLT).

It was the night before freedom. All of the Israelites were huddled in their homes. They had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years. Moses had conveyed God’s instructions to kill a lamb for each household and then put the blood on the doorposts of their homes. The Israelites were also commanded to roast the lamb and eat it—not leaving their homes until morning. That night, they waited in anticipation to see what would happen.

God struck the firstborn of every Egyptian home all the way up to Pharaoh’s household that first Passover night, as the angel of death “passed over” the homes of the Israelites. The cry must have been agonizing, but the next day—after 10 plagues and 400 years of slavery—the Israelites were finally free to leave Egypt under the leadership of Moses!

That’s the biblical story of the Exodus, which is commemorated each year during Passover. In Exodus 13:5-8, God commanded the Jewish people to recount the

story to their children year after year and to eat unleavened bread—what the Bible calls the bread of affliction—for seven days.

That’s what we call *matzah* (“unleavened bread”) today. Even though it’s made with flour (and no leavening agents), it must be mixed, rolled and shaped, and baked within 18 minutes to inhibit the rising.

For thousands of years, the Jewish people have told the story from the book of Exodus on the eve of Passover, “*the fourteenth day of the first month*” (Leviticus 23:5), in a special meal with symbolic food called a *Seder*, which means “order” in Hebrew. There are many traditions from all over the world, but the basic story is the same—God’s miraculous deliverance of the Jewish people against all odds.

Rabbi Levi Welton said that Passover, like all Jewish holidays, has a spiritual theme with applications for each person at any time.

“On Passover, the theme is freeing oneself from ‘personal slavery’ or self-limiting beliefs and transmitting a Jewish identity to the next generation. As the Talmud states in Tractate Pesachim 116b, ‘In each and every generation, a person is obligated to regard himself as though he actually left Egypt,’” says Welton.

Prior to Passover, Jewish people around the world remove all leaven from their homes. Varying traditions define leaven differently, but in general, it means that all bread, crackers, cake, cookies, noodles, and anything made with a leavening agent or flour are removed from the house. Many Jewish people even search every nook and cranny to make sure that not even a crumb remains.

At the Seder, certain foods are placed on a Seder plate

to symbolize parts of the story. A shank bone represents the sacrifice of the Passover lamb; an egg represents the cycle of life; *maror* (usually horseradish) symbolizes the bitterness of slavery; *haroset* (a sweet paste made of apples or dates) symbolizes the straw/mortar used to make the bricks in Egypt; and *karpas* (parsley or a vegetable) symbolizes springtime and is dipped in salt water to symbolize the tears of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt; and *matzah* (“unleavened bread”) is also included on the table in a pouch or napkin.

Christians find deep meaning in celebrating the Passover Seder. Jesus’ Last Supper was actually a Passover meal, and the bread that He blessed and broke saying, “*Take, eat; this is My body,*” was unleavened bread (Matthew 26:26 NKJV).

Because of Jesus’ words during the Last Supper, many Christians to this day take communion with matzah bread. Some even say that its designs, with stripes and piercings, are symbolic of the suffering that God’s Messiah, Jesus, endured when He was beaten and crucified. The fact that matzah is unleavened also represents His sinlessness.

Christians believe that Jesus was our Passover Lamb, sacrificed for the sins of the world. Many say that the cup Jesus raised was actually the third of four cups of wine that were drunk during Passover meals. The third cup is known as the Cup of Redemption, which fits perfectly with Jesus’ words: “*Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins*” (Matthew 26:27-28 NKJV).

Passover and Resurrection Sunday (Easter) often occur the same time in March or April. Passover is celebrated

for eight days, though only the first and last days are full holidays. In Israel, the Seder meal takes place on the first eve only; elsewhere in the world, Jewish people celebrate two consecutive Seder nights.

HOLIDAY GREETING

Chag Kasher V'Sameach

("Wishing you a happy kosher holiday!")

During the "intermediate days," one can wish
Moadim L'Simcha ("Wishing you a joyful holiday!")

INTERESTING TIDBIT:

In ancient times, the Passover observance included the sacrifice of the paschal lamb, which was roasted and eaten at the Seder on the first night of the holiday. This was the case until the Second Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed during the first century.

CHOCOLATE-COVERED CAMELIZED MATZAH CRUNCH

INGREDIENTS

4-6 sheets unsalted matzahs	½ teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup unsalted butter, cut into chunks	1 cup semisweet chocolate chips (or chopped bittersweet or semisweet chocolate)
1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar	1 cup toasted sliced almonds (optional)
Big pinch of sea salt	

This recipe makes approximately 30 pieces of candy. It is adapted from Marcy Goldman (betterbaking.com), whose latest book is *A Passion for Baking*. If you can't get matzahs, use plain crackers such as Saltines® instead and omit additional salt in the recipe.

For vegans or for Passover, Marcy advises that the recipe works well with margarine. And for our gluten-free friends, this would be superb made with any gluten-free cracker. If making for Passover, you should either omit the vanilla extract or find a kosher brand.

PREPARATION

Preheat oven to 375° F.

- Line completely with foil a rimmed baking sheet (approximately 11 x 7 inches). Make sure the foil goes up and around the edges. Cover the foil with a sheet of parchment (baking) paper. Line the bottom of the sheet with the matzahs, breaking extra pieces as necessary to fill in any spaces.

- In a 3 to 4-quart heavy-duty saucepan, melt the butter and brown sugar together. Cook over medium heat, stirring until butter is melted and mixture is beginning to boil. Boil for 3 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from heat, add salt and vanilla. Pour over the matzah, spreading with a heatproof spatula.
- Put pan in oven and reduce the heat to 350° F. Bake for 15 minutes. As it bakes, the mixture will bubble up, but make sure it's not burning. If it is burning in places, remove from oven and reduce heat to 325° F, then replace the pan.
- Remove from oven and immediately cover with chocolate chips. Let stand for 5 minutes, then spread with an offset spatula. If you wish, sprinkle with toasted almonds (or another favorite nut, toasted and coarsely chopped), a sprinkle of flaky sea salt, or roasted cocoa nibs.
- Let cool completely, break into pieces, and store in an airtight container until ready to serve. It should keep well for one week.

COUNTING THE OMER: FEAST OF FIRST FRUITS

“Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. When you enter the land I am giving you and you harvest its first crops, bring the priest a bundle of grain from the first cutting of your grain harvest. On the day after the Sabbath, the priest will lift it up before the LORD so it may be accepted on your behalf” (Leviticus 23:10-11 NLT).

The day after Sabbath during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, there's another holiday of offering: The Feast of First Fruits. Many Christians believe this holiday was fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus.

For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming (1 Corinthians 15:21-23 NKJV).

From Passover until *Shavuot*, or the Feast of Weeks, there's a period of 49 days in which Jewish people are commanded to count the Omer. It's found in Leviticus where it says, *“From the day after the Sabbath [Passover]—the day you bring the bundle of grain [Omer] to be lifted up as a special offering—count off seven full weeks. Keep counting until the day after the seventh Sabbath, fifty days later. Then present an offering of new grain to the Lord” (Leviticus 23:15-16 NLT).*

But what does this mean? An *Omer* was a unit of measure used for grain in biblical times. It's equal to about 9½ cups today. The Omer is counted figuratively every night after the evening prayers. The Jewish people say the

day, week, and time and then read a text from Psalm 67.

Boaz Michael of First Fruits of Zion says the Omer connects Passover to Shavuot, like an “unbreakable chain” delivering a spiritual lesson to us.

“It teaches us that salvation is both redemption—what took place at Passover—but it’s also the indwelling of God’s Spirit empowering us to walk out that salvation,” says Michael.

Michael says the way the Omer is counted today would have been the way it was counted 2,000 years ago in the time of Jesus and Psalm 67 would have been prayed prophetically *That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations. ... God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him* (Psalm 67:2, 7 NKJV).

Jewish people who were living in other nations would have gathered in Jerusalem during this time period for the pilgrimage feasts of Passover and Shavuot. Jesus would have ascended to heaven during the counting of the Omer.

“So, by counting the Omer, we’re reflecting upon not only what took place at Passover just a few weeks ago, but we’re leading up to a time in which God gave us His Torah, His instructions, His will and His wisdom in order that we may be the saved and redeemed people that He set us free to become,” Michael said.

In Israel today, there are four modern holidays and memorials that take place during these weeks of counting the Omer. These special occasions are deeply connected to the Jewish people and the rebirth of the modern State of Israel—Holocaust Remembrance Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, and Jerusalem Day. And while they are not mandated in Scripture, they are significant and two of them clearly fulfill prophecy.

YOM HASHOAH: HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

“I will give them, in My house and within My walls, a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give each of them an everlasting name that will never be cut off” (Isaiah 56:5 HCSB).

Never Again! That’s been the cry of the Jewish people since the end of World War II.

Yet a new wave of anti-Semitism is sweeping the world today. We have seen attacks on Jewish lives, communities, and synagogues as well as Nazi swastikas vandalizing Jewish gravestones and holy sites. The Jewish state is singled out for condemnation, boycott, divestment, and sanctions.

Israel faces hostility within the chambers of the United Nations as well as unfair press by the global mainstream media. The people of Israel also endure threats of war and terrorism along their dangerous borders.

It’s more important than ever that we remember the Holocaust. We must remember how the viral poison of anti-Semitism in Germany and throughout Europe led to the genocide of 6 million Jewish men, women, and children.

Yisrael Meir Lau, a former Israeli Chief Rabbi, is a Holocaust survivor who was born in Poland. He described anti-Semitism like this: “Anti-Semitism you can explain, but you cannot find a reason for it. It’s against dialogue. It’s against logic. It’s a spiritual madness.”

In 1959, Israel set the 27th of the Jewish month of Nisan, about a week after the end of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, as *Yom HaShoah* or *Yom HaZikaron laShoah ve laG’vrurah* (“Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’

Remembrance Day”).

That day marks the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, when the Jews in the ghetto in German-occupied Poland resisted the Nazis’ attempt to transport the remaining population there to concentration camps.

Each year, Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem opens the events with a large ceremony addressed by the President and Prime Minister. Six Holocaust survivors, often accompanied by a family member, light six giant torches in honor of the 6 million murdered by the Nazi death machine.

The following day, sirens blare, and the nation comes to a standstill to honor the memory of those who perished at the hands of the Nazis.

The name *Yad Vashem* is taken from a passage in Isaiah, where God declares, “*I will give them, in My house and within My walls, a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give each of them an everlasting name that will never be cut off*” (Isaiah 56:5 HCSB).

In 2005, the United Nations established International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27. This day marks the anniversary of the liberation of the largest concentration camp—Auschwitz-Birkenau—where it is estimated that more than 1 million people died, most of them Jews.

On the 75th anniversary of the Soviet liberation of the camp, more than 40 world leaders and senior officials gathered in Jerusalem at a historic event called “Remembering the Holocaust, Fighting Anti-Semitism.” The leaders came to say “never again” at what was the largest diplomatic event in Israel’s history.

YOM HAZIKARON: ISRAEL'S MEMORIAL DAY

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints (Psalm 116:15 NKJV).

A week after Yom HaShoah, Israelis mark *Yom Hazikaron* (“Israel’s Memorial Day”), remembering those who died fighting for the country even before it was established and for those murdered in terror attacks.

A televised state ceremony is held at the Western Wall, and neighborhoods throughout the country hold their own ceremonies in public places. Israelis stand in the streets for an hour or more as the people who died from those neighborhoods are honored.

Since Israel is frequently under attack—whether by rockets or terror attacks or infiltrations—the day is very real and relevant for most Israelis. Many visit cemeteries and attend other ceremonies on the day. Schools are in session but have special programs to honor the fallen.

On the evening before Israel’s Memorial Day and on the following morning itself, Israelis stand silent as a siren sounds—calling to mind the sacrifices that were made by family and friends for Israel’s freedom and security.

“I was thinking about all the soldiers from the beginning of the modern State of Israel up until today who had to fight on the front lines and on the home front,” says Shai Yosipov, a former IDF combat medic.

“It’s so important that everyone understands the price and the responsibility we have for living in this country. We not only remember our fallen loved ones, but we also acknowledge that there has always been a sacrifice

that needed to be made so that we could be here today,” says Yosipov.

“During the siren, I was praying for families who’ve lost so many, and I prayed that God would give them comfort from the pain,” says Sarah Rivka Yekutiel, who moved to Israel from Boston, Massachusetts, many years ago.

“It’s an emotional time for everyone, whether you’ve lost family or not. This day is very heavy and intense,” said Orital Saban, who recently moved to Israel from Canada.

More than 23,000 Israeli and Jewish soldiers and more than 3,100 terror victims have fallen since 1860.

At sundown on Israel’s Memorial Day, Israelis make an incredible leap—from mourning those who gave the ultimate sacrifice for freedom to celebrating *Yom HaAtzma’ut* (“Israel’s Independence Day”).

YOM HAATZMA’UT: ISRAEL’S INDEPENDENCE DAY

“Who has ever seen anything as strange as this? Who ever heard of such a thing? Has a nation ever been born in a single day? Has a country ever come forth in a mere moment? But by the time Jerusalem’s birth pains begin, her children will be born” (Isaiah 66:8 NLT).

On May 14, 1948, just before the Sabbath, some 350 guests crammed into an un-airconditioned Tel Aviv art gallery for a 32-minute ceremony that would change the world forever.

“We, members of the people’s council, representatives of the Jewish community of Eretz-Israel and of the Zionist movement, are here assembled on the day of the

termination of the British Mandate over Eretz-Israel and, by virtue of our natural and historic right and on the strength of the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz-Israel, to be known as the State of Israel,” declared David Ben-Gurion, executive head of the World Zionist Organization, chairman of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, and soon to be the first prime minister of the fledgling state.

On that historic day, Ben-Gurion spoke for 11 million Jewish men, women and children around the world who had no voice, no address, and nowhere to go. For the first time in nearly 2,000 years, they finally had their own nation in the land of their forefathers.

“It was promised to us by God. We are the only people in the history of the world that live on the same land, speaking the same language and believing in the same God more than 3,000 years,” says Isaac Dror, who heads the education efforts for Independence Hall, the place where the declaration was made.

Among the crowd of witnesses was Yael Sharett, whose father Moshe Sharett was on stage with Ben-Gurion and was the country’s first foreign minister and second prime minister. At 17, Yael wrote as her father dictated one of the drafts of the declaration. She shared a chair with her aunt at the ceremony.

“It’s really epic. It’s poetry actually. The only time I was really moved I must say was when the Rabbi Levine made the old age Jewish blessing: *Barukh ata adonai elohenu*

melekh ha'olam, shebecheyanu, v'kiymanu, v'higiyanu la'z'man ha'zeh,” says Yael.

That ancient Jewish prayer, which is recited on momentous occasions, offers thanks to God: “Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, King of the Universe, Who has kept us alive and sustained us, and brought us to this season.”

Then they sang *HaTikvah*—“The Hope”—Israel’s national anthem.

The next day, which was the Sabbath, U.S. President Harry Truman became the first world leader to recognize Israel.

“He understood something that most of his top advisors and ministers failed to see. This is truly prophecy being realized,” says Dror.

On November 29, 1947, the United Nations had passed resolution 181 calling for the creation of a Jewish State and an Arab State in British-controlled Mandatory Palestine. The plan set aside land in the Galilee, along the Mediterranean and the Negev Desert for the Jewish people, while the Arabs were to receive all of biblical Judea and Samaria, later known as the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and other small portions. Perhaps the most controversial part of the plan was that an international body would control Jerusalem.

Still, the Jewish people accepted the plan, but the Arabs rejected it. Less than six months later, the Jewish people declared independence. The following day, the armies of five Arab nations attacked Israel.

Many countries have fought wars for their independence, but Israel’s war was not common. They had been granted independence by the sovereign (Britain), the decision was

confirmed by the United Nations, and the Jewish people were returning to the historic land of their ancestors. But it was their neighbors who didn't want them to exist.

A year later, Israel was still standing and had increased its size by nearly 50 percent. Against overwhelming odds, this fledgling State of Israel not only survived but grew beyond expectation.

In honor of the 70th anniversary of the United Nations Partition Plan, Israel's mission to the U.N. celebrated by returning to the hall in Flushing Meadows, New York, where the U.N. vote had taken place.

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence said: "We gather today on the eve of a historic anniversary to celebrate what happened here, in this very hall, 70 years ago when the United Nations declared to the modern world an ancient truth, that the Jewish people have a natural, irrevocable right to an independent state in their ancestral and eternal homeland." Israelis celebrate Independence Day on the fifth of the Hebrew month of Iyar. During a televised ceremony that includes Israeli leaders, Israelis make the transition from mourning on their memorial day to celebrating their independence. Later that night, in cities and towns around the country, young and old take to the streets to listen to live music and dance Israeli folk dances.

On Independence Day, the Israeli Air Force flies over cities and along beaches to celebrate as their fellow citizens picnic and barbeque (what they call *mabngal*). At the close of the day, the country awards the Israel Prize to Israelis who have made a unique contribution to the country's culture, science, arts, and humanities.

GREETING

Hag Atzmaut Sameach

("Happy Independence Day!")

YOM YERUSHALAYIM: JERUSALEM DAY

I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth (Isaiah 62:6-7 NKJV).

For centuries, the Jewish people had been in exile. For a generation, they had been without access to their ancestral city. Yet for six unforgettable days in early June 1967, surrounded by enemies, Israel stood alone and changed history forever.

By 1967, Israel had already fought two major wars, and in May of that year, Arab nations joined together with a stated goal to wipe Israel off the map. Less than 20 years after the birth of the modern Jewish nation, Israel was on the verge of extinction.

Israel, along with Jewish people around the world, thought they were facing another Holocaust. In Tel Aviv and Haifa, they had turned parks into potential graveyards

and dug mass graves. But God had other plans.

After only six days (June 5-10, 1967), Israel had tripled in size—beating the combined armies of Syria, Egypt, and Jordan to win the Golan Heights, the Sinai Desert, and biblical Judea and Samaria. Perhaps the pinnacle of their success was reuniting the city of Jerusalem under Israeli-Jewish sovereignty for the first time in nearly 2,000 years.

It was on the third day of the war that Moshe Kempenski, an Orthodox Jewish author and Jerusalem shop owner, said he realized that he wasn't just reading and studying the Bible, but he had actually experienced the fulfillment of prophecy. A Canadian teenager at the time, Kempenski said he knew on that day he would one day become a Jerusalemite.

“When I fully began to realize the significance of being here and my child playing in a Jerusalem park 30 years later, I recall wondering if my son, Yoni, was one of the children that Zechariah saw in his vision,” says Kempenski.

Kempenski is referencing the passage in Zechariah where God promises, *“Once again old men and women will walk Jerusalem’s streets with their canes and will sit together in the city squares. And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls at play”* (Zechariah 8:4-5 NLT).

During all those years of exile, the Jewish people always ended their holiday prayers with “Next Year in Jerusalem!” The Holy City, though far away and unattainable to most for all those years, was still in their hearts and minds.

So, when Commander Motta Gur uttered those famous words, “the Temple Mount is in our hands” (*Har HaBayit*

B'Yadeinu), Jewish people around the world knew something miraculous had happened.

But despite Israel's clear win in a war it hadn't asked for, the international community never recognized Israeli sovereignty over united Jerusalem. After the war, Israel returned religious authority over the beloved Temple Mount to Jordan, who still manages it.

To this day, only Muslims are permitted to pray on the site where two Jewish Temples once stood in biblical times.

In 1980, the Israeli Knesset (parliament) passed the Jerusalem Law, which stated that all of Jerusalem (including the eastern part) was Israel's united capital. Thirteen countries removed their diplomatic missions from Jerusalem after the UN passed a resolution declaring Israel's law null and void. (Costa Rica and El Salvador moved their embassies back to Jerusalem in 1984 and then returned to Tel Aviv in 2006.)

In December 2017, in a historic move, U.S. President Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and on May 14, 2018—70 years after U.S. President Harry Truman recognized the State of Israel—Trump moved the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem. Guatemala moved its Embassy to Jerusalem shortly thereafter.

Jerusalem Day is celebrated in the city with a giant parade of Israeli flags that winds through downtown Jerusalem and ends at the Western Wall.

SHAVUOT (PENTECOST): FEAST OF WEEKS

“And you shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year’s end” (Exodus 34:22 NKJV).

On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages (Acts 2:1-4 NLT).

What’s the connection between God giving the Law to Moses and pouring out His Holy Spirit? They are both celebrated on the biblical Feast of Weeks or Shavuot, known in the New Testament as Pentecost.

Fifty days or seven weeks after Passover, Jewish people celebrate *Shavuot* (“weeks” in Hebrew). At the same time, Christians celebrate *Pentecost* (“fifty days” in Greek).

According to Jewish tradition, God called Moses up to Mount Sinai and gave him the Law—the two tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written as well as the entire Torah on Shavuot.

Rabbi Welton adds, “Some Jewish people feel that the Torah is like the wedding ring between them and God in the spirit of the verse, *I will make you my wife forever, showing you righteousness and justice, unfailing love and compassion. I will be faithful to you and make you mine, and you will finally know me as the LORD*” (Hosea 2:19-20 NLT).

He adds, “Each year on Shavuot we renew our nuptial vows to our Beloved. Many people have the custom to stay up all night, engaged in studying Torah to reenact the great excitement and love one has on their wedding night.”

Boaz Michael, founder of First Fruits of Zion, comments: “There’re so many beautiful parallels that take place for Shavuot. Imagine Mount Sinai with the mountains above it, the covenant given to the people of Israel. This reminds us of a *chuppah* [“canopy”] over a bride and a groom. It tells us that God is making a covenant with His bride, Israel. There’s a marriage that takes place.”

“Shavuot is the culmination of a series of events,” Michael continues. “We’ve finally been freed from slavery in Egypt, we’ve wandered through the wilderness, and now we’ve come to Mount Sinai. It’s here that we enter into an intimate relationship with God, through the giving of His commandments and then the covenant that He gives to us, the Torah.”

He concludes: “So this event links us to Acts chapter one verse eight, where Jesus tells His disciples that they’re going to receive the Holy Spirit and take His message to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Three times a year, God commanded the Jewish people to come up to Jerusalem, and one of those times was Shavuot.

“Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed” (Deuteronomy 16:16 NKJV).

The New Testament records that Jews were gathered in Jerusalem from all over the world when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost.

Many Jewish people stay up all night on Shavuot to study the Scriptures. The Ten Commandments are read, and in many Jewish communities, the Book of Ruth is also read. Before dawn, those in Jerusalem head to the Western Wall on foot where they pray and bless God.

Shavuot has become a time of eating dairy foods, chief among them cheesecake!

KATHARINE'S SAFTA'S CHEESECAKE

INGREDIENTS

1½ cups graham crackers
(or cookies of your choice)

½ cup butter

¾ cup plain curd cheese or
cream cheese mixed with
ricotta cheese

½ lemon

Sugar to taste

3 eggs

Pinch of nutmeg

Sultanas or raisins

PREPARATION

- Crust: Crush 1½ cups graham crackers or cookies of your choice. Mix with just under ¼ cup of butter, press into the bottom of a cake pan with a removable bottom (cheesecake pan).
- Filling: Mix together ¾ cup of plain curd cheese (or a mixture of ricotta and cream cheese) with vanilla extract, ¼ cup butter, sugar to taste, 3 eggs, half a lemon, pinch of nutmeg, and sultanas or raisins. Put filling on top of the crust and bake at 350° F for 40 minutes until it's set and golden brown. Cool in the pan before serving.

TISHA B'AV: DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE

And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month (which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of the LORD and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire (2 Kings 25:8-9 NKJV).

Tisha B'Av (“the ninth of the Hebrew month of Av”), is considered the saddest day on the Jewish calendar. It commemorates the destruction of both the First and Second Temples as well as other disasters that have befallen the Jewish people throughout the millennia. Although the day is based in part on biblical events, it is a Rabbinic fast day that marks the end of a three-week mourning period.

Rabbis say that both the First Temple built by King Solomon and the Second Temple built after the return from the Babylonian exile and expanded by King Herod the Great were destroyed on Tisha B'Av.

Jewish people also remember other tragedies that happened to them during this time, such as the Crusades, the Inquisition, pogroms, the Holocaust, and anti-Semitism in general. For instance, the Expulsion Order from England in 1290 was issued on Tisha B'Av; and the Alhambra Decree or Edict of Expulsion from Spain was issued on March 31, 1492, and gave the Jews until July 31 of that year to leave—that was Tisha B'Av.

More recently, in 2005, many Israelis took note when Israel's uprooting of 9,000 Jewish Israelis from 21 Gush

Katif Jewish communities in the Gaza Strip and four in the northern West Bank (Samaria) were uprooted in what was called the Disengagement. It was considered by political leaders at the time to be a unilateral “peace” move. Ironically, it occurred just at the end of Tisha B’Av.

Rabbi Welton told a story about the significance of Tisha B’Av throughout history revealed in a legend about French leader Napoleon Bonaparte. While traveling through a small Jewish town in Europe, he rode by a synagogue and heard terrible cries coming from within.

“Peering through the window, he saw an incredible sight: hundreds of men and women weeping. They were sitting on the floor on small stools holding candles while reading from books. The synagogue had an elaborate chandelier but only a few candles were lit. If not for the small candle lights, the magnificent synagogue would have been in complete darkness. It was a gloomy and sad sight to behold,” writes Rabbi Welton.

“Napoleon asked his advisers what misfortune had happened there. His top adviser responded that nothing new and terrible had happened, but that the Jewish people had a tradition to gather once a year on a day they called the ninth day of Av, the day marking the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Twice they built a magnificent Temple in Jerusalem and both were destroyed. After their second Temple was destroyed, the people were scattered all over the world and sold as slaves and somehow the Jewish people still exist without their Temple. In order to commemorate these sad events, they gathered once a year in synagogue. There they fasted, prayed, and read sad prophetic writings concerning the destruction of their

Temple and land.”

“The adviser concluded, *Mon Roi* (“my King”), what we see in this town is happening today in Jewish communities around the world.’

“Napoleon then asked, ‘And how many years ago was this Temple destroyed?’

“The advisor answered, ‘Over two thousand years ago.’

“His eyes widening in surprise, Napoleon exclaimed, ‘A nation that cries and fasts for over two thousand years for their land and Temple will surely be rewarded with their Temple,’” Welton concluded.

Today, Tisha B’Av is still considered a day of mourning, fasting, and prayer. The book of Lamentations is read in the synagogues. In Jerusalem, thousands of people often walk around the Old City Walls in a group at night.

EPILOGUE

We hope you have enjoyed this special journey through the annual cycle of the Jewish and Israeli holidays. There’s so much more that could be said. We want to leave you with an ancient blessing.

It’s known as the *Birkat HaCohenim*, the Priestly or Aaronic benediction or blessing, and it’s found in the Book of Numbers where God commanded Aaron and his sons to bless the children of Israel.

Today, it’s a part of daily Jewish prayers. And three times a year—at Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot (the pilgrimage festivals)—Jewish men believed to be from the priestly line gather at the Western Wall to bless the Jewish

MEET THE AUTHOR



Julie Stahl is a correspondent for CBN News in the Middle East. A Hebrew speaker, she has been covering news in Israel for more than 20 years. Julie’s life as a journalist has been intertwined with CBN—first as a graduate student in Journalism; then as a journalist with Middle East Television (METV) when it was owned by CBN from 1989-91; and now with CBN News’ Middle East Bureau in Jerusalem since 2009.

Julie has covered Israel’s wars with Gaza, unrelenting rocket attacks on Israeli communities, special reports on the Jewish communities in the Golan Heights and the biblical heartland of Judea and Samaria, archaeological discoveries proving the biblical account, and the return of the Jewish people to their ancestral homeland.

She has traveled to Poland to cover Holocaust-related events; to Paris to cover the Jewish response to rising anti-Semitism in Europe; and Portugal to cover events surrounding the Bnei Anusim—Jews forced to convert to Catholicism during the Spanish Inquisition, many of whom would now like to be recognized as Jews and return to Israel.

Julie also plays an integral role in the weekly CBN News program, *Jerusalem Dateline*. This award-winning show provides viewers a biblical and prophetic perspective to what is happening in Israel and the Middle East. *Jerusalem Dateline* is translated into multiple languages and has a broad viewership all across the globe.

ABOUT CBN ISRAEL

*A new wave of anti-Semitism
is sweeping the world today.*

We are seeing attacks on Jewish lives, communities, and synagogues. The Jewish state is singled out for condemnation, boycott, divestment, and sanctions. Israel faces hostility on university campuses and within the chambers of the United Nations as well as unfair press by the global mainstream media. The people of Israel also endure threats of war and terrorism along their dangerous borders.

Now is the time for Bible-believing Christians to take a stand against the viral poison of anti-Semitism, which only decades ago led to the genocide of 6 million Jews. Today, it threatens the very existence of the Jewish state and poses a very real danger to Jewish people everywhere.

We established CBN Israel to enable Christians to stand with Israel and bless her people in need. Together, we can combat the rising tide of global anti-Semitism and build bridges of hope and healing with the Jewish community around the world. You can send a clear message to the world—declaring that Christians will stand with Israel.

**Find out on the next page how you can
make a difference through CBN Israel.**

YOUR IMPACT

Humanitarian Work

Your support provides food, assistance, education, economic development, and hope to Israelis in need.

You are blessing Holocaust survivors, victims of terrorism, single mothers, immigrant families, and others who desperately need our help.

Breaking News

Your gift enables us to produce unbiased, independent journalism through broadcasts, podcasts, and online media dedicated to informing the world about what is happening in Israel and the Middle East through our news bureau in Jerusalem.

Documentary Films

Your support makes it possible to produce educational documentary films that tell the true history of Israel, its right to exist in the face of growing anti-Semitism worldwide, its innovative and entrepreneurial culture, and its commitment to helping others—even its enemies.

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