

Small Group Guide: Holy Days — The Fall Festivals

Overview

This guide is based on a sermon exploring the three fall festivals on the Hebrew calendar — the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles — and how each one points to Jesus Christ. Use this guide to spark meaningful conversation, deepen your understanding of Scripture, and consider how these ancient celebrations apply to your life today.

Key Takeaways

- The seven festivals on the Hebrew calendar are not merely ancient religious rituals. They are a framework God designed to point His people to Jesus — both His first and second coming.
- The Feast of Trumpets was a call to attention and preparation. The trumpet blast signaled the coming of the King and prompted the people to examine themselves during ten days of awe and repentance.
- The Day of Atonement was the most solemn day on the Hebrew calendar. The high priest entered the presence of God on behalf of the entire community, offering a sacrifice that pointed directly to what Jesus would do once and for all on the cross.
- Two goats were used on the Day of Atonement to illustrate two dimensions of what Christ accomplished: expiation (the removal of sin and guilt) and propitiation (the satisfaction of God's righteous wrath against sin).
- The Feast of Tabernacles was a joyful, week-long celebration of God's provision and presence. It looked back at God dwelling with His people in the wilderness and forward to the day He will dwell with His people forever in the new creation.
- We are currently living in the "summer" between the spring and fall festivals — the church age. The fall festivals remind us that history is moving toward a conclusion, and we should be ready.

Discussion Questions

Opening

1. The sermon opened by asking how you plan to spend your free time this fall. As you look at your calendar, what does it reveal about your priorities? Is there room for intentional reflection and spiritual preparation?
2. Before this sermon, were you familiar with the Hebrew festivals? What was your general impression of the Old Testament law and its rituals?

The Feast of Trumpets

3. In ancient Israel, a trumpet blast signaled either the arrival of a king or the approach of danger. The sermon asked whether the thought of Jesus' second coming brings you fear or a desire to celebrate. How would you honestly answer that question today?
4. The ten days of awe between the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement were a time of fasting, repentance, and remembrance. What would it look like for you to build a similar rhythm of honest self-examination into your regular life?
5. The New Testament writers used trumpet imagery when describing the return of Jesus. Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 and Revelation 11:15, summarizing their meaning in your own words. What do these passages stir in you emotionally or spiritually?

The Day of Atonement

6. The high priest could only enter the Holy of Holies once a year, and only after extensive purification. Hebrews 4:16 tells us that because of Jesus, we can now approach God's throne with confidence at any time. Does that truth feel real in your daily prayer life, or does it still feel distant? Why?
7. The sermon explained two important concepts:
 - Expiation: the removal of sin and guilt
 - Propitiation: the satisfaction of God's righteous wrath against sin

In your own words, why does it matter that Jesus accomplished both? How does understanding both concepts change the way you think about the cross?
8. The scapegoat carried the sins of the entire community out into the wilderness, never to return. Psalm 103:12 describes God removing our sins as far as the east is from the west. Do you live as though your sins have truly been sent away, or do you find yourself carrying guilt that has already been dealt with? How can your group help one another in this area?
9. The sermon noted that the term "atonement" can be understood as "at-one-ment" — the idea of being brought into unity with God. How does understanding atonement as restored relationship, rather than just legal forgiveness, affect the way you relate to God?

The Feast of Tabernacles

10. The Feast of Tabernacles was described as the most joyful celebration on the Hebrew calendar. The people camped together, feasted, and remembered God's faithfulness in the wilderness. What practices in your own life help you remember and celebrate what God has done for you?
11. It was during the Feast of Tabernacles that Jesus declared Himself to be the living water and the light of the world. Knowing the context of those declarations, how does that deepen your understanding of what Jesus was claiming about Himself?
12. Revelation 21:1-4 describes God dwelling with His people in the new creation, wiping away every tear, and ending all mourning and pain. The Feast of Tabernacles was a picture of this future reality. How does keeping eternity in view change the way you approach your current circumstances, struggles, or suffering?

Pulling It All Together

13. The sermon walked through all seven festivals and showed how the spring festivals were fulfilled historically in Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and the birth of the church. The fall festivals point to His return and the life to come. How does seeing the Bible as one unified story — with Jesus at the center — affect your confidence in Scripture?
14. The sermon closed with Paul's words to the Thessalonians, summarizing the hope of Christ's return and calling believers to encourage one another with these truths. Who in your life needs to hear words of encouragement grounded in the hope of eternity? How can you be intentional about that this week?

Practical Applications

- **Practice self-examination.** Set aside time this week — even just 15 to 20 minutes — to honestly reflect on the past year. Where have you fallen short? Where have you seen God's faithfulness? Confess what needs to be confessed and give thanks for what God has done.
- **Memorize a verse about atonement.** Consider committing 1 John 4:10 or Hebrews 4:16 to memory this week. Let the truth of what Christ accomplished sink deeper into your daily thinking.
- **Celebrate God's provision.** The Feast of Tabernacles was a deliberate, joyful act of remembering God's blessings. Make a list of five specific ways God has provided for you in the past year. Share that list with someone in your group or with your family.

- **Live with eternity in mind.** Look at your schedule for the coming month. Are there any commitments, habits, or priorities that need to be adjusted in light of the reality that Jesus is returning? Identify one concrete change you can make.
- **Encourage someone with the hope of Christ's return.** Reach out this week to a fellow believer who is going through a difficult season. Share with them the hope found in the promise that God will one day dwell with His people and wipe away every tear.
- **Come to the Fall Festival.** The church's fall festival on October 11th at Hill Farm is an opportunity to live out the spirit of the Feast of Tabernacles — gathering together, celebrating God's goodness, and inviting others into community. Bring your family, bring a friend, and come ready to enjoy what God has provided.

Closing Prayer

Close your small group time by praying together. Consider the following themes as you pray:

- Gratitude for the sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf
- Honest confession of sin, trusting that those sins have been sent away
- A renewed longing for the return of Jesus and the life to come
- Courage to live with eternity in mind in the week ahead