

On line

PURPOSE

- To learn about the Jewish Holidays

MATERIALS

- Bible

Background Information

There are several holidays that the Jewish people observed. They are Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year), Sukkot (Feast of Booths), Hanukkah (Festival of lights), Purim (Feast of Lots), Pesach (Feast of Passover), and Shavuot (Feast of Harvest).

Jesus spent his childhood in a family that observed the Scripture references and religious festivals. Our familiarity with these holy occasions give us additional insight into the life of Jesus. Scripture references tell us that Jesus observed these festivals throughout the rest of his life.

Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah is a period of repentance as the new year begins. Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the year. It is the day of Atonement. Jewish legends name Yom Kippur as the day when the fate of each person for the coming year is sealed.

Rosh Hashanah begins a period of ten days during which Jews reflect on God as the absolute creator and ultimate ruler. The legend that God judges all Jews during this time and decides the fate of each person has been reinterpreted. Today the holiday

encourages each person to judge himself. The ten days between the two holidays provide an opportunity to seek God's forgiveness and Jews take great pride. These days are called, Days of Awe.

Jews gather in the synagogue on Rosh Hashanah for prayer, reading of the scriptures and reflection of the past year. Each one works on the way they can improve themselves.

Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the whole year. God forgives the Jewish person of their sins, but they must go to the ones they have wronged and ask forgiveness. The blast of the ram's horn ends the service on Yom Kippur, God's judgment is complete. Yom Kippur is over.

Sukkot

Five days after Yom Kippur, Jews celebrate Sukkot for one week. Coming just after the Jewish New Year, Sukkot celebrates the blessings of the past months and the beginning of the next year's work. Jews take great pride in their work and like to work together. Sukkot recalls the forty years the Israelites wandered in the wilderness.

In ancient times the farmers lived in villages for company and protection. During harvest times too much time was lost going between their home and field. So as not to lose crops they often built small huts or booths. These were called Sukkots. A sukkot is a three sided hut with one side open. The rabbis gave very specific directions for these booths, They were to be made of tree branches, with openings between the branches. The roof was made of leaves and straw with open spaces so they could see the stars. They were often decorated very lavishly with fruits and vegetables. They often added lights. The family ate and slept together in the huts.

Hanukkah

The celebration of Hanukkah celebrates the heroic efforts of the Jewish people as they saved their faith from obliteration. The people fought a three year war because they refused to offer sacrifices to the foreign Gods. When their altars were destroyed they waited until they finally defeated the enemy to build new ones.

The eight candle menorah and the "helper" candle tradition began when at the end of the war they only had enough holy oil to last one day. Miraculously the candle burnt for all eight days.

Purim

Purim is the most playful of their holidays. It combines parts of Mardi Gras, Halloween and other costume parties. Masks, noisemakers, parades, games and feasting give it a carnival-like atmosphere. It also includes the giving of gifts to family, friends, and charity. Purim celebrates the triumph of the Jews over persecution and oppression.

The Megillah (scroll) of Esther is read in the synagogue on Purim. Each time they hear the name Haman, they make loud noise with voices, noisemakers, or stomping their feet. They focus on serving God so that they may take their place beside Mordecai and Esther in making the world better.

Pesach (Feast of Passover)

Pesach combines many traditions. It celebrates the Passover that we learn in Exodus. This story is told by the father during the seder meal. The seder plate includes maror (a bitter herb that symbolizes being a slave, karpas (a green herb) symbolizing new life and hope, hard-boiled egg to symbolize the regular temple offerings, shank bone of a lamb (not to be eaten) to represent the sacrificial lamb of Passover, haroset a mixture of apples, nuts cinnamon and

honey to represent the mortar and bricks. The seder also includes salt water for dipping, wine (drank 4 times) and matzah (unleavened bread) this is a reminder that there was no bread to rise.

This meal takes place in the home. This takes place the first night or two night of Passover. This sets the tone for lighting of the candles and the at kiddush (blessing sanctifying the festival). This also holds true the beginning of each Sabbath.

Shavout, Feast of Harvest

Shavout is celebrated seven weeks after Pesach. Pesach marked the beginning of barley harvest and Shavout marked the harvest time. Since this was usually a time of worry and uncertainty No weddings occurred, no new clothes were worn. This celebrates the giving of the Ten Commandments. The people usually traveled to Jerusalem to worship. Many people joined them as they traveled along. By the time they reached the temple they had quite a large crowd. They were lead by an ox with his horns decorated with gold and olive branches.

Shavout focuses on education. This is a time to introduce young children to the Hebrew alphabet. In many synagogues young people Jewish young people are confirmed in a ceremony called Bar Mitzah for boys or a Bat Mitvah for girls.

No handouts for this lesson.