Early Firstfruits & Omer

Yom Habikkurim

The following pages are samples from the book "A Family Guide to the Biblical Holidays." Only a portion of the First Fruits chapter is included.
Purpose of Early Firstfruits & Omer

There are actually two Firstfruits. The Firstfruits celebration that occurs the day following the Sabbath after Passover is considered Early Firstfruits. Fifty days later the Latter Firstfruits occurs, called the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost). The fifty days in between are called The Counting of the Omer. Occasionally you’ll see both the early and the latter firstfruits listed as one feast. This chapter is a combination of Early Firstfruits and Counting the Omer. Latter Firstfruits (Feast of Weeks) is addressed in the next chapter.

During Early Firstfruits, the firstfruits waved before the Lord were in the natural state—an omer of barley (and wheat, grapes, olives, etc.). During Latter Firstfruits (in the next chapter) the firstfruits waved before the Lord were in the prepared state—two loaves of bread (and wine, oil, etc.).

The day of Firstfruits is also called Yom HaBikkurim or Sfirat Haomer. The word firstfruits means “a promise to come.” The very first of the harvest is waved before God to acknowledge the land He gave the Israelites. Early Firstfruits is celebrated on a very special day. On this day the Bible records miracles occurring over and over (the day that God seems to be drawing our attention to). No other day (except Passover) is mentioned as many times in the Bible.

The day of Firstfruits never received the status of high holy day just because the Priest had to offer the wave-sheaf. It remained an ordinary working day on which the high priest would wave the sheaf before the Lord. Therefore, some do not consider Early Firstfruits an actual feast day.

COUNTING THE OMER

God commanded His people to count from the day after the Sabbath until the day that the Torah was given. This counting demonstrated how great the desire is for the day that commemorates the most special occasion.

The offering of new barley was brought to the Temple on the second day of Passover. The omer measure is one tenth of an ephah (i.e., 2.2 liters), and therefore a relatively modest offering (see Lev. 23:9), but until the omer had been brought to the priest in the Temple, none of the new produce could be eaten.
Firstfruits & Omer in Bible Times

The Israelites were to bring a special thanks offering to the Temple. In Jewish literature the festival is frequently referred to as *Atseret*, translated as “a solemn assembly.”

In Temple times, the order of Firstfruits and Counting the Omer was as follows:

1.) It was to be done the morrow after the Sabbath.
2.) They were to reap the harvest and “then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest.”
3.) The priest would wave the sheaf before God.
4.) There followed the counting of seven weeks from the day it was brought.
5.) The law enjoined that no fruit was to be gathered from newly-planted fruit trees for the first three years, and that the firstfruits of the fourth year were to be consecrated to the Lord (Lev. 19:23-25).

Early Firstfruits was the first harvest of the spring, making it an excellent time to give the grain offering to the Lord. By this time of the year, in Israel, many fruits have ripened and are ready to eat. The owner of such fruit brought the first-picked fruit to the Temple as a special sacrifice. The sheaf (traditionally understood to be of barley, which is usually harvested by Passover) is to be “waved before the Lord,” with accompanying sacrifices, and only after this ceremony may the grain of the new year be consumed.

The farmers in Israel were required to mark the fruits and grains designated that were most progressed in their growth. After marking them, sometimes with a red yarn, the farmer would declare them to be firstfruits. The marked samplings were taken to the Temple in Jerusalem as an offering to God. Rabbinic legislation set a minimum of one-sixtieth of the harvest of each species brought.

The Counting of the Omer was a time of great anticipation. This counting is comparable to that of a slave or prisoner, who counts the days to his freedom with great excitement. When one counts to a particular event or time, it demonstrates how deeply he wants to reach that point.

Jewish literature maintains that when the Israelites were told of their forthcoming liberation from Egypt, they were also informed that fifty days thereafter they would receive the Torah. The Israelites were so excited that they began counting the days till then.
Jewish Customs of Firstfruits & Omer Today

Modern observance of Early Firstfruits excludes the elements of the ceremony which are dependent on the existence of the Jerusalem Temple.

The rabbis feel that the practice of counting seven weeks should still be performed even in generations which cannot wave the sheaf. Therefore, traditional Jews still continue to count the omer as their ancestors offered up the omer in the Temple area.

Today, most Jews start counting from the second day of Passover, the day after Unleavened Bread. (Jesus was slain on the fourteenth of Nisan and arose the seventeenth.) This would be the day after the weekly Sabbath during the week of Passover.

The procedure for counting is as follows:

While standing each evening, the following blessing is recited:

“Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe who has sanctified us with His commandments, commanding us to count the omer.”

This is followed by a count for the day. The counting was always started at day one and continued until day fifty as follows:

- Today is the first day of the Omer.
- Today is the second day of the Omer.
- Today is the third day of the Omer.
- Today is the fourth day of the Omer.
- Today is the fifth day of the Omer.
- Today is the sixth day of the Omer.
- Today is the seventh day. That is one week of the Omer.
  etc.

Some recite Psalm 67 because it consists of seven verses and forty-nine words (in Hebrew).

This forty-nine-day period is considered semi-mourning because of several tragedies associated with this time of the year. Therefore, orthodox Jews do not shave, cut their hair, or perform weddings during this period.
As strange as it may seem, the Israelites who performed this ritual year after year were never told what the wave sheaf symbolized. The wave sheaf is clearly symbolic of Christ, the Firstfruits. He is the Firstfruits of the harvest, the coming harvest of the souls of those who have fallen asleep in Christ on that wonderful resurrection day of the Lord.

Firstfruits speaks of resurrection. When the Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign (a miracle or wonder), Jesus rebuked them and then said the only sign would be three days and three nights in the center of the earth as Jonah was in the belly of the whale. Jesus died on Passover. Death could not hold our Messiah. On the third day He arose triumphantly from the grave!

Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12: 38-41).

This sheaf of Firstfruits was typical of our Lord Jesus, who has risen from the dead as the firstfruits of those that slept (1 Cor. 15:20). That branch of the Lord (Isa. 4:2) was then presented to Him, in virtue of the sacrifice of Himself, the Lamb of God, and it was accepted for us. It is very observable that our Lord Jesus rose from the dead on the very day the Firstfruits were offered, to show that He was the substance of this shadow. We are taught by this law to honour the Lord with our substance, and with the firstfruits of all our increase (Prov. 3:9). They were not to eat of their new corn until God’s part was offered to Him out of it (v. 14), for we must always begin with God, begin our lives with Him, begin every day with Him, begin every meal with Him, begin every affair and business with Him; seek first the kingdom of God (Henry 1991).

Paul wrote “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Cor. 15:20). Our Messiah’s resurrection is the firstfruits, or promise, of the believer’s resurrection.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit (John 12:24).
The Hebrew root of *bikkurim* (firstfruits) is the same as that of *bekhor* (firstborn). The firstfruits are dedicated to God because the first of everything, including the firstborn of man and beast, belong to God. Jesus was the firstborn. And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name *JESUS* [Y’shua] (Matt. 1:25). For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren (Romans 8:29).

The Bible tells us that God, the great husbandman, eagerly awaits the precious fruit of the earth and has long patience in waiting for it (James 5:7). Unfortunately, while God is focusing on fruit, we are often focusing on other things. Sometimes we even focus on gifts which God has given, instead of the fruit we are to produce as a result of God’s gifts in our lives (Wagner 1995).

**THE MORROW AFTER THE SABBATH**

There are two different views¹ about when Early Firstfruits occurs. This difference comes from different interpretations of Leviticus 23:11. And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: “on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.”

There are two kinds of sabbaths in the Bible. The seventh day of the week is the weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days are also considered Sabbaths. So the “morrow after the sabbath” would either mean 1.) the day after the weekly Sabbath after Passover or 2.) the day after the second day of Passover, which is a Holy Day. If you plan on celebrating the holidays you’ll need to understand the two views, because which view you hold to will affect the date of Early Firstfruits, Counting the Omer and Latter Firstfruits (because it is fifty days from Early Firstfruits).

The Messianic and Sadducean method places the Early Firstfruits festival and the day of the start of the counting of the Omer as the day after the seventh-day (Saturday) Sabbath during Passover. The Rabbinic method places Firstfruits as the second day of Passover (i.e., the day after the sabbath of Passover instead of during).

Y’shua is the Firstfruits of those who rise from the dead. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:20-21).

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PUTTING ON THE NEW MAN

Firstfruits is also a visual lesson instructing us how God wants us to change through Christ (as Unleavened Bread). When one accepts Jesus as the Passover Lamb who died for our sins, our position before God changes to sinless (without yeast) because Jesus took on our sins. We are righteous through Jesus. Unleavened Bread teaches us to put off the old man and Firstfruits teaches us to put on the new man. *And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness* (Eph. 4:24). We put on the new man by allowing the Holy Spirit to live a life of Christ through us. As Paul said in Galatians 2:20, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

*Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour* (Eph. 5:1-2).

AWAITING THE COMFORTER

Do you think the disciples were expecting the Holy Spirit fifty days after the resurrection—at Feast of Weeks (Pentecost)? Due to the significance of the Jewish holidays, I believe at least some of the disciples guessed the Holy Spirit would come at the end of the fifty days. Jesus had told them the Comforter was coming. *Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you* (John 16:7). They knew the Holy Spirit was coming and they were in the process of counting the fifty days until the Feast of Weeks. Jesus told His disciples “… ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” (Acts 1:5) They must have at least wondered if maybe it was going to happen on the fiftieth day? On Pentecost they were gathered together: *And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place* (Acts 2:1).

We can only guess at the anticipation they had awaiting the promised comforter. Some Christians today have the same anticipation for Christ’s second coming. Think about the anticipation. Do you know what it is like to wait for a guest who has not told you exactly when he or she will arrive? It is diffi-
cult to wait patiently for an exciting event. Jesus had to live by faith. We need to follow His example of living in complete faith and obedience to the Father. Can you imagine how they would have felt if Jesus told them He would not return for two thousand years? Sometimes a detailed outline of future events can be a hindrance instead of a help to our faith in God.

*These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid* (John 14:25-27).

*For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth* (Acts 1:5-8).
### OTHER EVENTS OCCURRING ON THE DAY OF FIRSTFRUITS

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<td>Nisan 17</td>
<td>Noah’s Ark safely rested on Mt. Ararat (Gen. 8:4)</td>
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<td>Nisan 17</td>
<td>Hebrews entered Egypt (Exod. 12:40-41) 430 years before deliverance.</td>
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<td>Nisan 17</td>
<td>Moses led the Israelites through the Parting of the Red Sea (Exod. 3:18; 5:3)</td>
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<td>Nisan 17</td>
<td>Day of Firstfruits, Israel entered and ate the fruits of the Promised Land (Joshua 5:10-12)</td>
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<td>Nisan 17</td>
<td>The Walls of Jericho (Joshua 5:13)</td>
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<td>Nisan 17</td>
<td>The Cleansing of the Temple by Hezekiah (eight hundred years after entering the promised land) (2 Chron. 29:1-28)</td>
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<td>Nisan 17</td>
<td>Queen Esther saved Hebrews from elimination (Esther 3:12; 5:1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nisan 17</td>
<td>The Resurrection of the Messiah</td>
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The odds of just two of these events all happening on the same day of the Hebrew year (360 days) are one in 129,000.

The odds of these events all happening on the same day of the Hebrew year are one in 783 quadrillion, 864 trillion, 876 billion, 960 million (783,864,876,960,000,000). (Fraie 1993)
### The Week of and Before the Crucifixion

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>6:00 P.M. - 6:00 P.M.</th>
<th>Events of Jesus</th>
<th>Matthew</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Luke</th>
<th>John</th>
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<td>Weekly Sabbath before Passover</td>
<td>Nisan 10 Friday/Saturday</td>
<td>Sabbath at Bethany. First of three suppers, two anointings.</td>
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<td>12:2-11</td>
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<td>Passover Day of Crucifixion</td>
<td>Nisan 14 Tuesday/Wednesday</td>
<td>Preparation of last supper. Passover supper. Gethsemane, led away to be crucified. Crucified at 9:00 A.M., died at 3:00 P.M., buried at 6:00 P.M.</td>
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<td>14 15</td>
<td>22 23</td>
<td>13 19</td>
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<td>Sabbath of Unleavened Bread</td>
<td>Nisan 15 Wednesday/Thursday</td>
<td>First night, first day in the tomb.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second Day of Unleavened Bread</td>
<td>Nisan 16 Thursday/Friday</td>
<td>Second night, second day in the tomb.</td>
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Suggestions for Celebrating Firstfruits

Read the section titled “Messianic Significance of Firstfruits.”

Read the resurrection story below or a storybook.

When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus’ disciple: He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed. And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre. Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch. In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshiped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me. Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if
this come to the governor’s ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day. Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshiped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 27:57-28:20).

Read Ephesians 4:24; 5:1-2 and Galatians 2:20. Explain how Unleavened Bread teaches us to put off the old man and Firstfruits teaches us to put on the new man.

DIRECTIONS FOR COUNTING THE OMER:

When we count the omer, we are looking forward to and anticipating joyfully our coming union with Christ the Messiah at His Coming! The daily “counting of the omer,” then, beginning with the first Omer, representing Christ Himself, risen from the dead, continues for forty-nine days (until Pentecost) and spiritually symbolizes the firstfruits which have been “harvested” throughout the centuries and millennia leading up to the great day of Christ’s coming, when Christ will complete the Harvest of Firstfruits and then marry His bride (the church)!

During the forty-nine days of the counting of the omer, we cleanse ourselves of our impurity by repenting. You will need a copy of the two Omer pages included and a glue stick or tape. Hang the page with fifty squares in a prominent area of your home. Each day, preferably during devotions, color and cut out the sheaf. One member of the family, or everyone at one time, can “count the days.” You may decide to read Bible verses relating to agriculture, such as harvesting or planting. Custom has it to count by saying “Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, commanding us to count the omer. Today is the first day of the omer.” Allow the youngest child to glue or tape a sheaf in the square. On day fifty, celebrate Pentecost! You could also make a counting of the Omer chart and cut sheaves from fabric as a sewing project you can use every year.
To be ready for your production on Latter Firstfruits, you may need to begin this activity during Omer time. Using this idea from *Together at Home* by Dean and Grace Merrill, pretend you are the newscaster and write a script similar to a newspaper story. A hint for condensing your news story is to include only the most important and factual information you have. Set a sixty-second time limit and try to have the gifted talker in your family try to hit it.

If you want to have all the time you want, pretend you have a mini-documentary and talk slower. Be creative and add sound effects! (See “Family Drama” in Passover section.) Interview more disciples and visitors, maybe even a Gentile.

If you have or can borrow a video camera—use it! If not, use your regular camera and place the photos in a scrapbook you could make about the holidays.

**TV CONSTRUCTION**

Use a discarded window shade or a disposable white plastic tablecloth. Find a sturdy box and cut a hole for the picture tube area in front. The box should be a size where half of a broomstick handle will stick out some on each side. It could also be smaller, as a portable TV. You can buy a dowel stick if no broom or mop handle is available. Cut your shade or tablecloth to fit inside the box and fill your “viewing screen.” Mark lines to show where picture “frames” end. Either a shade or a tablecloth would have to be cut apart and joined with tape to make a continuous long strip.

Create as many scenes as you want to go along with the newscast. Remember you will need more if you’re making a documentary. As a suggestion, try to have one scene for every 5 to 10 seconds of news, or every 20 to 30 seconds of documentary.

Markers or acrylic paints work best. Use masking tape to anchor top end of your picture roll to a handle. Insert handle in bottom holes, then tape. You can remove tape from handle to change rolls.

**NOTE**

Some families may like these media ideas so well they could adapt them for other holidays. They would work well for Passover or Purim where the feast itself is based on a specific historic event. Home schoolers may want to use this idea to show a historical event.
Firstfruits Recipes

HONEY-BARLEY MUFFINS

1 cup barley flour
3/4 cup unbleached all-purpose flour
1/4 cup wheat germ or bran
1 T baking powder
1/2 tsp. salt
2 egg whites or 1 whole egg
1/4 cup oil
1/2 cup milk
1/2 cup honey

Mix all dry ingredients together and all wet ingredients together. Now put
the two together and stir just until mixed. Pour into cupcake papers in muf
fin tin or grease the muffin tin. Bake in preheated 375° oven for 20 minutes.
NOTE: For extra special touch, put a teaspoon of all-fruit jam or apple jelly
in the center of each muffin before baking.

During Unleavened Bread:
Omit baking powder, increase to 3 egg whites, beat them until stiff and fold
gently into batter last. Fill cups (11) nearly full. They won’t rise much. Bake
at 350° for about 25 minutes.

BARLEY VEGETABLE STEW

1/2 cup hulled barley (if you use pearled barley, see Note below)
4 cups water (or 2 to 2 1/2 cups if using prepared, pearled barley)
1/2 cup pizza/pasta sauce
1/4 cup onion, chopped, or 1 T dry flakes)
1/4 to 1/2 T garlic powder
2 T chicken-flavored powder or 2 bouillon cubes
1/2 T salt or to taste
2 carrots, diced
1 potato, diced
1 cup green beans or peas
1/2 cup to 1 cup bonded chicken pieces, optional
Crossword Puzzle

Across
2. First five
4. Grain used for cereals
6. Oldest heir
8. Large departure
10. Jonathan’s best friend
12. The city
14. Clusters of edible berries
16. Unexplainable events
17. A tenth part
18. Edible plant product
20. Back to life
22. Sanctuaries
23. Biblical book full of enumerations
24. A fine, powdery meal from a grain
25. Important food, source of oil
26. An old language
27. Highness
28. To name or list one by one
30. A sacred song
32. Celebrations
33. Book of many edicts
34. Holy day

Down
1. More than one week
3. Contribution
5. Not late
7. Solomon built one
9. A declaration of commitment
10. Book in the Bible
11. You can count up to fifty of them
13. Queen
15. The origin
19. Responsible for Temple
21. Essence
22. Sanctuaries
23. Biblical book full of enumerations
24. A fine, powdery meal from a grain
28. Tall annual cereal grass bearing kernels
29. One of only eight survivors
31. Miriam’s brother
## Word Search

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### Words:

- **BARLEY**
- **BIBLE**
- **BORN**
- **COMFORTER**
- **CORINTHIANS**
- **CORN**
- **COUNT**
- **DAVID**
- **DEUTERONOMY**
- **EARLY**
- **ESTHER**
- **EXODUS**
- **FEASTS**
- **FIRST**
- **FIRSTBORN**
- **FLOUR**
- **FRUIT**
- **GENESIS**
- **GOD**
- **GRAIN**
- **GRAPE**
- **HARVEST**
- **HEBREW**
- **HIGH**
- **INCREASE**
- **JERUSALEM**
- **KING**
- **LATTER**
- **LEVITICUS**
- **MIRACLE**
- **MOSES**
- **NOAH**
- **NUMBERS**
- **OFFERING**
- **OLIVES**
- **OMER**
- **PRIEST**
- **PROMISE**
- **PSALM**
- **RESURRECTION**
- **SABBATH**
- **SHEAF**
- **SPRING**
- **SUBSTANCE**
- **TABERNACLES**
- **TEMPLE**
- **TITHE**
- **TORAH**
- **WEEK**
- **WEEKS**
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