

Leviticus Chapter 23

Verses 23:1 – 27:34: Holiness issues that pertain to the nation collectively are outlined.

Verses 1-44: This section comprises a list of the holy seasons in the Israelite religious calendar, including the three great celebrations of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Beginning with Sabbath observance, the list concluded with the joyous Feast of Tabernacles, with its emphasis on God's deliverance of captive Israel from Egypt.

This chapter lists, in order by date, the seven "feasts" of Israel: "Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Weeks, Trumpets, Day of Atonement", and "Tabernacles". The Feast of Purim was established after the events described in (Esther 9:17-32), long after Moses. The Hanukkah celebration was established even later and is described in the non-canonical books (of 1 and 2 Maccabees).

(Numbers chapters 28 and 29), describe the offerings presented on these days.

This section points to days which are sacred to the Lord. After the Sabbath (verse 3), the feasts are given in the order of the calendar (verses 4-44).

Leviticus 23:1 "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,"

Much about the same time as before. And having delivered to him various laws concerning the holiness of the people of Israel, who were to serve him, and of the holiness of the priests, that were to minister in holy things to him. And of the purity and perfections of their sacrifices, he here appoints various times and seasons, for the more special worship and service of him.

"Saying": As follows.

Leviticus 23:2 "Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, [Concerning] the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim [to be] holy convocations, [even] these [are] my feasts."

"Feasts of the Lord" is the term used in the expression "tent of meeting" (moed); thus, they are large assemblies of the people taking place at set times, and as "holy convocations", they are celebrated at the tabernacle. The description of these events as feast (hag, which means "pilgrim feast" or simply "holiday", i.e., a day or season of religious joy), indicates their joyful character, and demonstrates that not all the gatherings within the sanctuary precincts were necessarily solemn or filled with foreboding.

"Proclaim to be holy convocations": These festivals did not involve gatherings of all Israel in every case. Only the feasts of:

- (1) Unleavened Bread;
- (2) Weeks; and

(3) Tabernacles required that all males gather in Jerusalem (compare Exodus 23:14-17; Deut. 16:16-17).

These feasts are really days set aside as holy days. I believe this includes the daily, weekly, monthly, as well as special feast days. Some of the festivals, or feasts, that quickly come to mind are the Feast of Trumpets, Passover, Feast of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Day of Atonement, and Feast of Tabernacles. Of course, there were daily offerings, Sabbath, and New Moon festivals. These were times to remember the blessings God has bestowed upon His people. These are very holy times. All people who worship choose days that are important to keep holy. Each one of these festivals are recognized for a separate reason, which we will cover in these lessons. These are not times we have chosen as holy days, but days God has chosen as holy days.

Leviticus 23:3 "Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day [is] the sabbath of rest, a holy convocation; ye shall do no work [therein]: it [is] the sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings."

"The "Sabbath" followed the pattern of God's rest from creative activity (Gen. 2:3), and it was to be set apart (Exodus 20:11). This sanctity was reinforced in the manner of giving manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16:5, 23-30). Two lambs were sacrificed on the Sabbath, as opposed to one on the other days of the week (Num. 28:9, 19). In the New Testament, the "first day of the week" (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2; Acts 20:7; Rev. 1:10), commemorating Christ's resurrection, replace the Jewish Sabbath as a regular period for Christian worship.

In six days God created the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested. This set the pattern for the time of work and the time of rest to be observed on this earth. Convocation, in the Scripture above, means public gathering. Sabbath, in the Scripture above, means intermission. God established this intermission from work for the good of man, as well as having a day set aside to worship Him. Jesus explains this in:

Mark 2:27 "And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath:"

The Sabbath Moses spoke of here, was to be observed from sunset Friday until sunset Saturday. This was observed on the last day of the week, or the 7th day.

Verses 4-22: Three events were commemorated in Mar./Apr.

- (1) Passover on the 14th (verse 5);
- (2) Feast of Unleavened Bread on the 15th – 21st (verses 6-8); and
- (3) Feast of Firstfruits on the day after the Sabbath of Unleavened Bread week (verses 9-14).

Leviticus 23:4 "These [are] the feasts of the LORD, [even] holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons."

What follow besides the Sabbath mentioned.

"Which ye shall proclaim in their seasons": The proper times of the year, the day or days, and month in which they are to be observed. These were to be proclaimed by the priests with the sound of trumpet. Namely, what follows, for they are put together, which had been before for the most part singly delivered.

This is not speaking of just Sabbath, but is speaking of all the festivals, as well. When we were in Israel, the beginning of Sabbath was proclaimed by three blasts on the ram's horn. These holy times were to be observed by all, not just the High Priest and the priests.

Verses 5-8: The "Passover" commences the "Feast of Unleavened Bread", celebrating the Lord's deliverance of Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 12:14-20; 43-49; 13:3-10; Num. 28:16-25). These feasts occur in March or April, and are followed by the Feast of Firstfruits.

Leviticus 23:5 "In the fourteenth [day] of the first month at even [is] the LORD'S passover."

The "Passover" goes back to (Exodus 12:1-28), and commemorated the deliverance of the enslaved Israelites from Egypt by a mighty act of divine redemption. The event served as a wonderful illustration of the redemption Christ accomplished at Calvary (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7): He was the offering without blemish (Exodus 12:5; 1 Peter 1:19), the Lamb who had to be killed (Exodus 12:6; John 12:24, 27), whose blood had to be applied (Exodus 12:7; Heb. 9:22).

The first month of their religious year was Nisan which is approximately the same as our April. I say approximately, because they did not observe the same time as we do today to change a month. Every complete change of the moon proclaimed a new month. Their months were about 28 days long. The LORD's Passover was a time to remember the night in Egypt, when death passed over the Hebrew's homes which had the blood of the lamb over the door. In all of Egypt, those who did not have the blood over the door, lost the first born of both man and beast. To remember this special night, each Passover, Jewish families eat the Passover supper. The animal is roasted and they eat bitter herbs and unleavened bread with the meal. We go into this in greater detail in other lessons. I would like to say that we Christians have a Passover Lamb. His name was Jesus Christ our LORD. When we are washed in His blood, we receive eternal life. Jesus, not only ate Passover with the disciples, but was in fact the Passover Lamb Himself. Both His eating and His being the Passover Lamb occurred between sunset and the next sunset. Both things occurred on the day Passover was celebrated.

Leviticus 23:6 "And on the fifteenth day of the same month [is] the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread."

The "feast of unleavened bread" began on the evening of Passover (Exodus 12:6, 8), and lasted for seven days. On the first day, homes were to be cleared of leaven and a "holy convocation" was to be called (Exodus 12:16). This week was concluded with another convocation. The rituals

are described in (Numbers 28:16-25). This, along with the Feasts of Pentecost (Weeks), and Tabernacles, had the character of pilgrimage celebrations. All adult males in Israel were required to observe these three great feasts (Exodus 23:17; Deut. 16:16). Unleavened Bread and Passover are usually considered as one feast. By this feast, Israel not only expressed heartfelt joy for the Lord's deliverance, but was reminded of its devotion to the Law (Exodus 13:9) and the implications of covenant relationship.

The unleavened bread symbolized the body of Jesus which was without sin. Unleavened means free from sin. Jesus is the Bread. Jesus took our sin on His body that we might receive His righteousness. This Feast of Unleavened Bread was an extension of eating unleavened bread of the Passover. Unleavened Bread continued 7 days beyond Passover. We have been reminded that 7 means spiritually complete. The Unleavened Bread of the Passover was eaten in a ceremonial meal. The week of Unleavened Bread is to be observed even in ordinary meals eaten that week.

Leviticus 23:7 "In the first day ye shall have a holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein."

That is, on the first of the seven days of the feast of Unleavened Bread, even the fifteenth day of the month Nisan. This was separated from the other days of the festival, and more particularly devoted to religious exercises (see Exodus 12:16).

"Ye shall do no servile work therein": Such as agriculture, or any manufacture or mechanical business. Which they and their servants were at other times employed in. But they might bake bread, and boil or roast their meat, and walk abroad, which they might not do on their Sabbaths. And therefore, it is so expressed as to distinguish it from the work forbidden on that day.

This time of separation from work and the things of the world gave them a time when they could remember that God had made them His people, and they were to live holy lives. This Unleavened Bread reminded them of the necessity to live without sin.

Leviticus 23:8 "But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD seven days: in the seventh day [is] a holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work [therein]."

A burnt offering was to be offered unto the Lord on every one of the seven days, which were two young bullocks, one ram, and seven lambs. Besides a meat offering, and a goat for a sin offering (Num. 28:19).

"In the seventh day is a holy convocation, ye shall do no servile work therein": As on the first day, that was on account of the Israelites going out of Egypt. And this is said, on account of Pharaoh and his host being drowned on it (see notes on Exodus 12:16).

We remember from previous lessons, that offerings made by fire showed total dedication to God. Notice the beginning and the end of this week were holy days. We must not only begin with God, but we must end with Him as well.

Verses 9-14: The Feast of Firstfruits celebrated the first grain harvest of each year, the barley harvest, by commemorating Yahweh's faithfulness to His people. The priest waved the "sheaf of the Firstfruits ... before the Lord" as the people's pledge that what belonged to Him would be given back to Him. The offering of the Firstfruits coincided with Christ's resurrection (1 Cor. 15:23).

Leviticus 23:9 "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,"

At the same time, for what follow are the other feasts and holy convocations before spoken of.

"Saying": As follows.

Verses 10-14: "Sheaf of the first fruits": A "sheaf" was actually an "omer", about two quarts, presented to the Lord on the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The "waving" by the priest before the Lord may have involved making the sign of the cross. This token offering was accompanied by burnt, grain, and drink offerings. The ceremony acknowledged God as the real author of all the land's crops by making a representative presentation of the crops to Him, thereby consecrating them. The concept of firstfruits is popular in the New Testament: referring to the earliest converts as the firstfruits of the Spirit (Rom. 8:23). To the Jews as precursors of the Christian church (Rom. 11:16); to individual believers (Rom. 16:5); to Christ as the firstfruits of resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20); to believers born again by the Word of God (James 1:18); and to the group that had been redeemed as firstfruits (Rev. 14:4).

Leviticus 23:10 "Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest:"

What is next observed, it being incumbent on them to do what is enjoined.

"When ye be come into the land which I give unto you": The land of Canaan, which God had given by promise to their fathers and to them. And which they were now going to inherit. As yet they were in a wilderness, where there was no sowing nor reaping, nor any harvest. So that the following law, though now given, could not take place till they came into the land of Canaan.

"And shall reap the harvest thereof": The barley harvest, which was about this time, the month Nisan, and which had the name Abib, from the barley being then in the ear (see Exodus 9:31); for the wheat harvest was not till seven weeks after.

"Then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest": To with it as after directed. This is called an omer in the text, which was the tenth part of an ephah (Exodus 16:36). And so Jarchi interprets it here; according to the Jewish writers, when the sheaf was reaped, the corn was beat out and winnowed, and dried by the fire, and then ground in a mill. And an omer, or a tenth part of an ephah of the flour of it was taken, and oil and frankincense put upon it. A handful of which being put upon the altar, the rest was the priest's. And with this pretty much

agrees the account Josephus gives, who says, on the second day of unleavened bread, which is the sixteenth (day of Nisan), of the fruits they have reaped they take a part. For they do not touch them before, accounting it just to honor God first, from whom they receive the plenty of these things. And bring the firstfruits of the barley after this manner, having dried the handful of ears, and bruised them, and cleansed them from the bran. They bring to the altar a tenth part to God, and casting one handful of it on the altar, they leave the rest for the use of the priests. And from here forward it is lawful to reap publicly and privately.

It appears that firstfruits of the grain were to be offered in conjunction with unleavened bread. The first and best of the harvest was chosen and put in a sheaf, and brought, and waved before the Lord. No one was to eat any of the harvest, until the first had been given to God. This would be dedicating the whole crop to God. It is interesting to note, that no crop which had been fertilized or artificially watered would be acceptable for this firstfruits offering. God had promised His people that their crops would do well, as long as they worshipped Him alone.

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."

Or the omer of barley. This was done by the priest in the tabernacle and temple, where the presence of God was. And that before the handful of it was put upon the altar; which agitation or waving was, as Gersom says, towards the east; it was moved to and fro, backwards and forwards, upwards and downwards, to make an acknowledgment to the Lord of heaven and earth. That the fruits of the earth and the plentiful harvest were of him, and to give him the praise and glory of it.

"To be accepted for you": Of the Lord, as a thanksgiving to him. For the harvest now ripe, and the appointed time of it, and the plenty thereof. And that the remainder might be sanctified and blessed to them, and they have leave to gather it in, which they had not till this was done.

"On the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it": After the first day of the feast of unleavened bread, which was a Sabbath, or day of rest, as appears from (Lev. 23:7). Or upon the sixteenth day of the month. And this was the first of those fifty days, in the close whereof was the Feast of Pentecost.

This sheaf of grain that was offered was showing that all the crop really belonged to God. It is through the blessings of God, that bountiful crops are produced. Any farmer will tell you, that by the grace of God, they have a good crop. The persons (usually three men), who went and brought in the sheaf of grain were not breaking the Sabbath. It was permissible to go and get the sheaf for the offering in the temple. Actually Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits of the harvest happened approximately the same time. Jesus was the Passover Lamb, Jesus was the Unleavened Bread, and He is the First Fruits of God's harvest.

Leviticus 23:12 "And ye shall offer that day when ye wave the sheaf a he lamb without blemish of the first year for a burnt offering unto the LORD."

Besides the daily sacrifice of the morning and evening, and the additional offerings made on every one of the seven days of the feast of unleavened bread.

"A he lamb without blemish of the first year, for a burnt offering unto the Lord": Typical of the perfect and immaculate Lamb of God, whose sufferings are fitly signified by a burnt offering. And which were endured at the time he became the firstfruits of his people, and sanctified them.

We have gone into this more fully in another lesson, but I will touch on just a few things here. Of course, the fact that this is a he lamb is because it shadows the body of Jesus, and therefore must be a male. A male lamb that is one year old has never been with a female lamb. This indicates the fact that Jesus never married. This was a burnt offering showing that Jesus paid it all for us. All of these offerings here, seem to overlap. That is exactly what Jesus did for all of us in that one offering of Himself. Jesus did not just fulfill one or two of these offerings, but He fulfilled them every one, in the perfect sacrifice of Himself. This sacrifice of Himself was to do away with all other sacrifices. His sacrifice was for all time for everyone who would believe and accept Him as our sacrifice.

Leviticus 23:13 "And the meat offering thereof [shall be] two tenth deals of fine flour mingled with oil, an offering made by fire unto the LORD [for] a sweet savor: and the drink offering thereof [shall be] of wine, the fourth [part] of an hin."

The usual measure of flour to a meat offering was one tenth deal (Exodus 29:40). But here it is doubled. Some Jewish writers say one tenth was on account of the lamb that was offered at this time, and the other as was suitable for a meat offering. But the true reason seems to be, because it was on account of the fruits of the earth and the plenty thereof. And therefore, a double measure of fine flour mixed with oil was required as a token of gratitude. For thankfulness ought to be in proportion to mercies.

"An offering made by fire unto the Lord for a sweet savor": A handful of it was burnt upon the altar, and was received with acceptance by the Lord, and the rest was eaten by the priests (Lev. 2:2).

"And the drink offering thereof shall be of wine, the fourth part of an hin": Which was the common quantity for a drink offering (Exodus 29:40). For, as Jarchi observes, though the meat offering was doubled, the drink offering was not. The reason of which seems to be, because these offerings were on account of the harvest and not the vintage. The Targum of Jonathan calls it wine of grapes, to distinguish it from wine that might be made of other things, but not to be used in drink offerings, only the pure juice of the grape.

We touched on this also in an earlier lesson, but I would like to remind all of us of just a few highlights of this. The meat offering did not contain flesh, but was made up of the elements used in making bread. Jesus is the Bread of Life. This was called a meat offering, because it shadowed the flesh of Jesus. This is one of the few places where the drink offering is mentioned. This wine symbolizes the blood of Jesus. The Bread symbolizes His body.

John 6:53 "Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you."

Matthew 26:26-28 "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed [it], and brake [it], and gave [it] to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body." "And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave [it] to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;" "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

We have said this before, but it is very important to remember that God is a Spirit. If God was the author of the Bible, as I believe He was, then the only way to truly understand the Bible is through the Spirit.

Leviticus Chapter 23 Questions

1. What were the feasts of the LORD called in verse 2?
2. Name some of the holy days.
3. What were the people to remember in these festivals?
4. Who decided which days were holy?
5. ___ days shall work be done.
6. What is the 7th day?
7. What set the pattern for 6 days of work and one day for rest?
8. What does convocation mean?
9. What does Sabbath mean?
10. What did Jesus say about the Sabbath in Mark?
11. In recent years in Jerusalem, how is Sabbath proclaimed?
12. Who was to observe these holy times?
13. When is the LORD's Passover to be observed?
14. What was the first month of the religious year for the Jews?
15. What signaled a new month?
16. What did Passover remind them of?
17. What were they to eat at Passover?
18. Who is the Christian's Passover Lamb?

19. How does Jesus save our lives?
20. How could Jesus eat the Passover supper and be the Passover Lamb?
21. When did unleavened bread officially begin?
22. What does unleavened mean?
23. What does the number 7 mean spiritually?
24. What did this time of rest allow them to do?
25. When did firstfruits occur?
26. What was offered as firstfruits?
27. What peculiarity did the crop where the sheaf of grain was taken have?
28. What was to be done with the sheaf of grain?
29. How are bountiful crops produced?
30. What three festivals happened about the same time?
31. What was to be offered at the same time as the sheaf being heaved unto the LORD?
32. Why must the lamb that was offered be a he?
33. What was meant by this lamb being under one year of age?
34. Is it correct to sacrifice now? Why?
35. What was peculiar about the meat offering?
36. Why then, was it called a meat offering?
37. How does the author believe is the only way to truly understand the Bible?