

Leviticus 23 • The Lord's Appointed Times

Introduction

[NOTE TO SMALL GROUP LEADERS: This lesson is a bit longer than usual.]

One reason for the establishment of these feasts is that they corresponded to pagan holidays. God did not want His people to follow the footsteps of the non-believing nations around them, so He provided a calendar which allowed them to remain set apart exclusively to Him. But if we scratch a little deeper we find that these events not only provided a foundation to teach about the role and work of the Messiah to come, but revealed God's basic plan for the reconciliation of all mankind to Him through the Messiah. What is provided as **literal** instructions turned out to have even greater and highly significant **spiritual** application for every child of God during every age of history past, present and future.

It is interesting to note that although Passover is specified as marking the beginning of each new year, modern Judaism has changed the order so that the Feast of Trumpets signals each new year to coincide with the modern Western calendar. This speaks volumes about the deception that the Messiah of the Millennial Kingdom can be realized without first accepting the Messiah the Lamb of Passover. Without the proper sequence beginning with the blood of the Lamb applied to the heart, it is impossible to realize the benefits of the King coming to establish His kingdom on earth.

¹The LORD spoke again to Moses, saying, ²“Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘The LORD’S appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations—My appointed times are these:

[Read v.1-2]

Q: Why might it be deceiving to call these “feasts” as many do?

A: Strictly speaking, all of them include food except the Day of Atonement, which is a fast. “Feast” is another way of saying “celebration”.

Q: What is a “holy convocation”?

A: “Holy” means to be separated and set apart; it therefore references the fact that these days were not to be treated as other days but set apart and separated unto God alone, much in the same way that His people were to be set apart and separated unto Him. “Convocation” is a gathering, which was signaled by the sounding of trumpets. (Numbers 10:2)

Q: Why is it significant that God specifically categorizes these things as “My appointed times”?

A: It is not just to show that these were not man-made, but to teach something about God's overall control—His entire plan, if you will. The word “appointed” is often used in conjunction with announced signs, judgments or events from God and therefore speaks of something greater at work than simply a holiday.

Application: God calls His people to be set apart to Him exclusively.

³For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings.

[Read v.3]

Q: Why do you suppose God started off with the Sabbath as first on the list?

A: The Sabbath is the “sign of the covenant” between God and Israel; it's what Israel pledged to do as a symbol of their complete obedience to **ALL** of God's commandments every day of the year, not just during special holidays.

Point: We are not excused from the daily, “little” things in the pursuit of what we think are “larger”, more important things. The celebrations were worthless if one's everyday mind and heart were not wholly committed to God in the first place.

Leviticus 23 • The Lord's Appointed Times, Page 1 of 8

Q: How do we know that this is not, strictly speaking, referring to attending church?

A: Because it states that it takes place “in all your dwellings”. It’s something to be honored by every person regardless of where they’re located, not just in the synagogue or the tabernacle.

Application: *It’s not about being obedient just when and where others can observe us, but truly from the heart in whatever place we’re at. This message from God begins with a call and need for personal obedience.*

⁴“These are the appointed times of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at the times appointed for them.

⁵In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the LORD’S Passover. ⁶Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. ⁷On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work. ⁸But for seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work.”

[Read v.4-8]

Q: Why do you suppose that there is not much information provided here about Passover?

A: It is the first and foremost feast for which a wealth of information and instruction has already been given. (See Ex. 11-13)

Point: *Everything depends on the blood of the Lamb—no other feasts are possible if there is no Passover. Those who would diminish or completely do away with the blood undermine the very foundation of God’s plan.*

Q: What is the greater spiritual significance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread?

A: It is God’s people putting sin out of their life and feeding on the Lamb that that they might have strength for the journey. Biblically speaking, leaven is a metaphor for sin and bread is a metaphor for the Word.

Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Co. 5:7-8)

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Co. 7:1)

Q: How might Passover and Unleavened Bread relate directly to each other doctrinally?

A: The order of these events cannot be reversed or substituted for each other. One cannot be saved by simply putting away sin (leaven), nor will anyone want to put away sin until they have first been saved by the blood.

Q: What is the difference between “reformation” and “regeneration”?

A: “Reformation” is focused on restoring some aspect of religious practice or ideology; “regeneration” is being born again by the Spirit of God, which is the greater illustration of what is taking place here.

Application: *First the blood of the Lamb, then the putting away of sin.*

⁹Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁰“Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. ¹¹He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD for you to be accepted; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it. ¹²Now on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb one year old without defect for a burnt offering to the LORD. ¹³Its grain offering shall then be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering by fire to the LORD for a soothing aroma, with its drink offering, a fourth of a hin of wine. ¹⁴Until this same day, until you have brought in the offering of your God, you shall eat neither bread nor roasted grain nor new growth. It is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places.

¹⁵You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the sabbath, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete sabbaths. ¹⁶You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh sabbath; then you shall present a new grain offering to the LORD. ¹⁷You shall bring in from your dwelling places two loaves of bread for a wave offering, made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of a fine flour, baked with leaven as first fruits to the LORD. ¹⁸Along with the bread you

[Read v.9-14]

Q: What is immediately different about this celebration from the previous two?

A: First, it was not to be celebrated while they were in the wilderness, but only once they took possession of the Promised Land—“*When you enter the land which I am going to give you...*” (v.10) Second, it would be impossible to celebrate with what they had in the wilderness as they would need to possess fields from which comes such harvests—“*...and reap its harvest...*” (v.10)

Q: When finally celebrated in the Promised Land, when did it specifically take place?

A: On the day **after** the Passover Sabbath. (v.5-6) At the first light of dawn of the first day of the week (Sunday), the High Priest would ceremonially clip cuttings from the trees on the Mt. of Olives and wave them before the altar in the Temple as a token that the whole harvest belonged to the Lord.

Observation: *Worshipping on Sunday—“The Lord’s Day”, was not entirely an invention of the Church, but actually had a foundation in God’s calendar provided through His Word.*

Q: What is the greater spiritual illustration to which this is speaking?

A: All four Gospels affirm that Christ’s resurrection occurred precisely at dawn on the first day of the week after Passover, coinciding with the Feast of First Fruits. (Mt. 28:1; Mk. 16:2; Lk. 24:1; Jn. 20:1) Christ the First Fruits was rising at the exact time the High Priest was executing the rituals of the Feast of First Fruits. As Paul will specifically later teach, because Christ the First Fruits is alive, the entire resurrection harvest of all believers belongs to God.

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. (1 Co. 15:20-24)

Application: *The whole harvest—both literal and spiritual—belongs to the Lord.*

[Read v.15-21]

Q: How is this celebration similar to the previous one?

A: It could not be celebrated while Israel was in the wilderness, but only upon taking possession of the Promised Land.

Q: What is this feast commonly called?

A: Originally known as “The Feast of Weeks”, it is most commonly referred to today as “Pentecost”, which means “fifty” in reference to its taking place fifty days after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This is the birthday, so to speak, of the Church composed of both believing Jews and Gentiles.

shall present seven one year old male lambs without defect, and a bull of the herd and two rams; they are to be a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD. ¹⁹You shall also offer one male goat for a sin offering and two male lambs one year old for a sacrifice of peace offerings. ²⁰The priest shall then wave them with the bread of the first fruits for a wave offering with two lambs before the LORD; they are to be holy to the LORD for the priest. ²¹On this same day you shall make a proclamation as well; you are to have a holy convocation. You shall do no laborious work. It is to be a perpetual statute in all your dwelling places throughout your generations.

Q: Even to this day, what specific Scripture is required reading in Jewish synagogues as part of the celebration of Pentecost?

A: The Book of Ruth, a story about a Gentile bride who is saved by her Jewish redeemer—an Old Testament illustration of what would literally take place as witnessed in Acts 2.

Q: While not specifically proven in Scripture, according to Jewish tradition, what else is Pentecost the anniversary of?

A: It is believed to be the same day on which Moses presented the Law to Israel as given to him by God. Tradition holds that all the languages of the table of nations (seventy in all) were heard at that time in parallel to Acts 2 when everyone heard the Gospel in their own language, and whereas three thousand fell when the Law was given (Ex. 32), three thousand were saved at Pentecost, an illustration that *“the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”*. (2 Co. 3:6)

Q: How was the gap between First Fruits and Pentecost accounted for in the New Testament?

A: For forty days Christ ministered to the disciples (Acts 1:3) and for the next ten days they prayed and waited for Pentecost to arrive.

“But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. (Jn. 16:7)

Q: What is the significance of the two loaves of bread? (v.17)

A: Called *“a new grain offering”* in v.16, the two loaves symbolize Jews and Gentiles baptized into one body (the Church) by the Holy Spirit.

Q: Why do you suppose that in this particular case, leaven is a required ingredient, whereas it is regularly forbidden in other cases?

A: It illustrates how there is sin in the Church on earth today.

Q: What might be important about the fact that in the Feast of First Fruits the priest waved sheaves of grain, but here he waves loaves of bread?

A: It illustrates how believers have been united in Christ by the Spirit.

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Co. 12:13)

Q: There are three feasts in the first month of the Hebrew calendar and three in the last month with Pentecost in between. To what does the long gap between the feasts speak?

A: It depicts the Church Age. Israel has rejected her Lamb and cannot receive the Spirit until she receives her Messiah. In her current state she has no temple, no priesthood, no sacrifices and no king—all of which are addressed in the next three feasts.

Application: *The bread that would come from the grain illustrates how believers would be united in Christ through the Spirit at Pentecost.*

²²“When you reap the harvest of your land, moreover, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field nor gather the gleanings of your harvest; you are to leave them for the needy and the alien. I am the LORD your God.”

[Read v.22]

Q: What is this provision probably a greater reminder of when it comes to the proper worship of God by His people?

A: The Law is not based exclusively on love for God, but equally requires love for others. Even within the requirements of these celebrations, provisions are made to incorporate right treatment of others as a reminder that it is evidence of a right relationship with God.

Application: A right relationship with God requires a right relationship with others, even during the Lord’s appointed times.

²³Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²⁴“Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘In the seventh month on the first of the month you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. ²⁵You shall not do any laborious work, but you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD.’”

[Read v.23-25]

Q: What does the Feast of Trumpets illustrate for literal Israel?

A: The regathering of Israel when God shall call them from the ends of the earth.

In that day the LORD will start His threshing from the flowing stream of the Euphrates to the brook of Egypt, and you will be gathered up one by one, O sons of Israel. It will come about also in that day that a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD in the holy mountain at Jerusalem. (Is. 27:12-13)

“For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. (Eze. 36:24)

Q: What does the Feast of Trumpets illustrate for the Church?

A: We await the sound of His trumpet signaling our return to Him in the air.

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (1 Co. 15:51-52)

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Th. 4:16-18)

“But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Mt. 24:29-31)

Leviticus 23 • The Lord’s Appointed Times, Page 5 of 8

Application: Whereas the first set of feasts represent the work of the Messiah at His First Coming, the second set of feasts represent the work of the Messiah at His Second Coming.

²⁶The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
²⁷“On exactly the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you, and you shall humble your souls and present an offering by fire to the LORD. ²⁸You shall not do any work on this same day, for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the LORD your God. ²⁹If there is any person who will not humble himself on this same day, he shall be cut off from his people. ³⁰As for any person who does any work on this same day, that person I will destroy from among his people. ³¹You shall do no work at all. It is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places. ³²It is to be a sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall humble your souls; on the ninth of the month at evening, from evening until evening you shall keep your sabbath.”

[Read v.26-32]

Q: What is this event more commonly called?

A: The Day of Atonement. (See Lev. 16-17)

Q: What is the repeated phrase throughout these verses which serves to characterize what is to take place in the hearts of the participants?

A: “...you shall humble your souls...” (v.27), “If...any person...will not humble himself...” (v.29), and “...you shall humble your souls...” (v.32).

Application: Atonement for sins was not merely achieved by a ritual sacrifice made on behalf of the people, but required their personal participation in the proper preparation of their heart in concert with what took place.

Q: How does Jewish tradition treat the ten days between the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement?

A: They are often called “The Terrible Days” or “The Days of Awe”, a time when each individual is to prepare personally for repentance of sin and ensuring a right relationship with God.

Q: In the Passover the Messiah is represented by the Lamb. How is the Messiah represented in the Day of Atonement?

A: By the scapegoat upon whom the sins of the nation are placed and sacrificed on everyone’s behalf.

Q: How does this annual event depict a greater, ultimate fulfillment to come for literal Israel?

A: In one day, Israel will repent and look to the Messiah.

“I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn. (Zech. 12:10)

“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (Eze. 36:25-27)

Q: How does this Old Testament event foreshadow a greater, ultimate fulfillment to come for the Church?

A: At the judgment seat of Christ the Church will be cleansed of all defilement—be made pure and beautiful for the marriage supper of the Lamb.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Co. 5:10)

Application: *The Messiah returns for those who have returned to Him in sincerity and repentance from the heart.*

³³Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ³⁴“Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘On the fifteenth of this seventh month is the Feast of Booths for seven days to the LORD. ³⁵On the first day is a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work of any kind. ³⁶For seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation and present an offering by fire to the LORD; it is an assembly. You shall do no laborious work.

³⁷“These are the appointed times of the LORD which you shall proclaim as holy convocations, to present offerings by fire to the LORD—burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each day’s matter on its own day—³⁸besides those of the sabbaths of the LORD, and besides your gifts and besides all your votive and freewill offerings, which you give to the LORD.

³⁹“On exactly the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the crops of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD for seven days, with a rest on the first day and a rest on the eighth day. ⁴⁰Now on the first day you shall take for yourselves the foliage of beautiful trees, palm branches and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. ⁴¹You shall thus celebrate it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. ⁴²You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths, ⁴³so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.”

⁴⁴So Moses declared to the sons of Israel the appointed times of the LORD.

[Read v.33-44]

Q: What do we commonly call this event?

A: It is identified here as “*the Feast of Booths*”, (v.34) but it is also referred to by many as “*the Feast of Tabernacles*”. It is also called “*the Feast of Ingathering*” in Scripture. (Ex. 23:16; 34:22)

Q: What was the first and foremost literal reason for this feast?

A: It was a reminder of God’s provision and protection of His people while they were in the wilderness. (v.43)

Q: How does this event speak of things to come for Israel?

A: There is a future Feast of Booths which will take place when the Messiah the King establishes His Millennial Kingdom on earth.

Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them. If the family of Egypt does not go up or enter, then no rain will fall on them; it will be the plague with which the LORD smites the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths. This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths. In that day there will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, “HOLY TO THE LORD.” And the cooking pots in the LORD’S house will be like the bowls before the altar. Every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the LORD of hosts; and all who sacrifice will come and take of them and boil in them. And there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts in that day. (Zech. 14:16-21)

“You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God. (Eze. 36:28)

Q: What is one of the New Testament proofs that Jews associated the Feast of Booths with the Millennial Reign of the Messiah?

A: This is what Peter attempted to initiate on the Mt. of Transfiguration. Seeing the Messiah together with Moses and Elisha, Peter wanted to build three booths because he prematurely thought it was the initiation of the Millennial Reign as celebrated by the Feast of Booths. (Mt. 17:1-13)

Q: Why might the fact that this feast follows the harvest be significant?

A: It teaches that God will have gathered all of His harvest prior to Christ the Messiah establishing His earthly kingdom.

Q: What is the chief difference between what is to take place in the hearts of the participants compared to the Day of Atonement?

A: Whereas the chief characteristic during the Day of Atonement is to humble one’s self, here it is specifically commanded, “*you shall rejoice before the LORD Your God*” (v.40)

Leviticus 23 • The Lord’s Appointed Times, Page 7 of 8

Application: *The Feast of Booths represents the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom.*

Overall Application

This calendar of feasts mirrors God's "prophetic timetable". Each event teaches about God's ultimate work through the Messiah both for His First Coming when He chiefly worked as the Messiah the Suffering Servant to address the issue of sin, and as we anticipate His Second Coming as the Messiah the Conquering King when He shall gather His own and establish His earthly kingdom in the Millennial Reign. It is in alignment with the way that God operates, disclosing what will ultimately happen in the end from the very beginning revelations of His Word.

*Declaring the end from the beginning,
And from ancient times things which have not been done,
Saying, 'My purpose will be established,
And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; (Is. 46:10)*

When the Law and its literal requirements was given through Moses, a greater spiritual foundation was being laid to teach about God's greater plan for all of mankind through the Messiah to come.