

Exegetical Notes – Leviticus 23:1-44

“The Appointed Feasts”

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Leviticus 23:1-44

Verse 1-2

YHWH said to Moses, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of YHWH, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies.’”

- What follows in this chapter is a list of specific events which Israel is to celebrate annually as a way of remembering YHWH and what YHWH did for Israel. Though the days are called “feasts” and “convocations” they do not always involve eating or meeting together. They are ways of proclaiming God’s involvement with his people.

The Seven Day Sabbath

Verse 3

“There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to YHWH.”

- The Hebrews were given permission to work for six days. But every seventh day, they were to rest. This was so that they might acknowledge God as creator of the universe by following his example (Genesis 2:2) and to provide for people and animals to rest. It was also a form of witness to their neighbors. While the rest of the world struggled and worked, the Hebrews rested, confident that YHWH would take care of them.
- Breaking the Sabbath was an offense punishable by death.

The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread

Verse 4-8

“These are YHWH’s appointed feasts, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times. YHWH’s Passover begins at twilight on

the fourteenth day of the first month. On the fifteenth day of that month YHWH's Feast of Unleavened Bread begins; for seven days you must eat bread made without yeast. On the first day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work. For seven days present an offering made to YHWH by fire. And on the seventh day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work.”

- The first Passover occurred when the Hebrews were still slaves in Egypt. To force Pharaoh to release the Hebrews, God sent the angel of death throughout Egypt with orders to kill all of the first born in the land. The Hebrews were instructed to put the blood of a lamb on the door post and lintel of their houses. When the angel saw the lamb’s blood, he passed over the houses of the Israelites and spared their first born. (See Exodus 12) The next day, Israel was told to leave Egypt in haste. They did not have time to wait for their bread dough to rise because they were in a hurry to depart. Therefore, they left the yeast, leaven, out of it. This feast remembered that event.
- The purpose of this celebration was to remember God’s act to deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt.
- This feast was to be celebrated in the first month, Abib on the Canaanite calendar or Nisian on the Babylonian calendar.
- Today this feast always falls near Easter. The spotless, innocent lamb which was killed to save the people, reminds us of Jesus, our Savior, who died to save us from sin and death.

First-fruits

Verse 9-14

YHWH said to Moses, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. He is to wave the sheaf before YHWH so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath. On the day you wave the sheaf, you must sacrifice as a burnt offering to YHWH a lamb a year old without defect, together with its grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil – an offering made to YHWH by fire, a pleasing aroma -- and its drink offering of a quarter of a hin of wine. You must not eat any bread or roasted or new grain, until the very day you bring this offering to your God. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live.’”

- On the Sabbath which followed the 14th of Abib, the day of Passover, the priest was to offer a sheaf of wheat from the first of the grain harvest to YHWH as a wave offering. The sheaf represented the first and the best of the offering which was returned to YHWH in gratitude.
- See 1 Corinthian 15:20 where Jesus is referred to as the “first-fruits of those risen from the dead.”

Feast of Weeks (Pentecost)

Verse 15-22

“From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to YHWH. From wherever you live, bring two loaves made of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour, baked with yeast, as a wave offering of first-fruits to YHWH. Present with this bread seven male lambs, each a year old and without defect, one young bull and two rams. They will be a burnt offering to YHWH, together with their grain offerings and drink offerings -- an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to YHWH. Then sacrifice one male goat for a sin offering and two lambs, each a year old for a fellowship offering. The priest is to wave the two lambs before YHWH as a wave offering, together with the bread of the first-fruits. They are a sacred offering to YHWH for the priest. On that same day you are to proclaim a sacred assembly, and do no regular work. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live.””

“When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am YHWH your God.””

- Fifty days after the feast of First-Fruits, the Feast of Weeks began. It was called the Feast of Weeks because it was seven weeks after First-Fruits. It is also call Pentecost for it was celebrated fifty days after First-Fruits. Pentecost means fifty.
- For the Hebrews this was a thank you celebration for the bounty of the harvest
- See Acts 2. It was at the beginning of this feast that the Holy Spirit fell on the Church.

Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah)

Verse 23-25

YHWH said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites: ‘On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. Do no regular work, but present an offering made to YHWH by fire.’”

- The priest blew the silver trumpet of YHWH to summon God's people, to announce war, and to announce special moments in the history of the nation. This blowing of the trumpet was to announce the beginning of the new civil years. This was a celebration of new beginnings.

The Day of Atonement

Verse 26-32

YHWH said to Moses, “The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present an offering made to YHWH by fire. Do no work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before YHWH your God. Anyone who does not deny himself on that day must be cut off from his people. I will destroy from among his people anyone who does any work on that day. You shall do no work at all. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live. It is a sabbath of rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. From the evening of the ninth day of the month until the following evening you are to observe your sabbath.”

- See Leviticus 16:2-34.
- On this day the priests were to offer sacrifices to make intercession for themselves, the civil leaders of the nation, and the people of Israel. It was a time of repentance.
- The Day of Atonement was a somber celebration marked by the offering of sacrifices, fasting, and rest. This was the day when Israel sought forgiveness from the hand of YHWH.

The Feast of Tabernacles (Booths)

Verse 33-44

YHWH said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites: ‘On the fifteenth day of the seventh month YHWH’s Feast of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days. The first day is a sacred assembly; do no regular work. For seven

days present offerings made to YHWH by fire, and on the eighth day hold a sacred assembly and present an offering made to YHWH by fire. It is the closing assembly; do no regular work. (These are YHWH's appointed feasts, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies for bringing offerings made to YHWH by fire -- the burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings required for each day. These offerings are in addition to those for YHWH's Sabbaths and in addition to your gifts and whatever you have vowed and all the freewill offerings you give to YHWH.) So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to YHWH for seven days; the first day is a day of rest, and the eighth day also is a day of rest. On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before YHWH your God for seven days. Celebrate this as a festival to YHWH for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come; celebrate it in the seventh month. Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am YHWH your God.''" So Moses announced to the Israelites the appointed feasts of YHWH.

- This feast was associated with joy and was a reminder to the Hebrews that God had provided them on their journey to the place he had promised them.
- This last feast followed the Day of Atonement. Restoration with YHWH always brings celebration, peace, and great joy.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *The Appointed Feasts*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen*. They are used here by permission.)