

Leviticus
Chapter 23
Instructor

Contents: The Feasts of **JEHOVAH**.

Characters: **GOD**, Moses.

Conclusion: The Sabbaths of the **LORD** in our lives and dwellings are to provide beauty, strength and safety. Meeting together with other believers should provide comfort and encouragement. **See Hebrews 10:23-25.**

Key Word: Feasts, 2.

Strong Verses: 3, 22.

Special Note: All festival/celebrations were based on the *lunar*ⁱ calendar and not the *solar*ⁱⁱ calendar.

Striking Facts: Israel was given seven great religious festivals. All point to the coming of the **CHRIST**. Purim and Hanukkak are **not authorized** celebrations. The authorized Feasts are:

Name of Celebration	Time of Celebration
a. Sabbath	7 th day of week
b. Passover,	Twilight, on the 14th day of first month
c. Feast of unLeavened bread	15th day of the same month
d. Feast of first-fruits	One day after the first harvest Nisan/Abib (Barley Harvest)
e. Feast of Pentecost (Weeks)	7 Sabbaths later
f. Feast of Trumpets	1st day of 7th month
g. Day of Atonement	10th day of 7th month
h. Feast of Tabernacles (Booths)	15th day of 7th month

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The effects of the Great Feasts on the people

I. Political effects. Annual gatherings of the people showed the numerical strength of the nation. As they went “from strength to strength,” *i.e.*, from company to company (**Psalms 84:7**), on their way to Jerusalem, and saw the vast crowds flocking from all parts of the kingdom to the capital, their patriotic zeal would be ignited. The unity of the nation would also be ensured by this fusion of the tribes. Otherwise, they would be likely to disintegrate into separate tribal states. They would carry back to the provinces glowing accounts of the wealth, power, and resources of the country.

II. Sanitary effects. This would greatly influence the health of the people. The Sabbath, necessitating weekly cleansings, and rest from work, along with laws relating to the ceremonies concerning disease (i.e. leprosy) and purifications, deserve to also be looked at in this light. The annual purifying of the houses at Feast of Un**Leavened (sin)** Bread; the dwelling at certain times in tents, leaving the houses to the free for circulation of light and air; and the repeated journey on foot to Jerusalem, must have had a great sanitary influence. As man was the great object of creation, so was his welfare—in many respects besides religion—was plainly aimed at in these regulations.

III. Social effects. They promoted friendly discourse between travelling companions, and distributed information through the country at a time when the transmission of news was slow and imperfect. Additionally, remote districts were given a practical knowledge of all improvements in arts and sciences. This enlarged the general stock of knowledge by bringing many minds and a great variety of taste together. These wonders were displayed before the nation and collected in Jerusalem by the wealth and foreign alliances of Jewish kings.

IV. Moral effects. Young believers look forward to, and older believers could look back upon, past or future pilgrimages to the city of the great King. Historical education would provide memories, hopes and desires. This would influence the habits of the people. The nation had to manage individual resources and expenses of the journey. The promise of maintaining fellowship provides an opportunity for reward to well conducted youth. The increasing opportunity for knowledge, improvement of tastes, advantages to health, fixing habits, etc., would all affect the morality and character of the people.

V. Religious effects. The maintenance of the faith and unity of the people were the most important benefits of the annual festivals. It would constantly remind the people of the Divine deliverances of the past. These past deliverances will promote gratitude and trust. This would also encourage the reverence of the people for the Temple and its sacred contents, thereby influencing well-conducted Temple services and the synagogues through the land. All of this will lead the mind of the nation to adore the one true and only **GOD**. (*J. C. Gray*.) **Corrections added by C. E. Battle**

1. The first was the **Sabbath**.

2. The second was the **Passover**. It was a perpetual commemoration of their deliverance from the oppressor and from death—a standing testimonial that their salvation was by the blood of the **Lamb**. It is the keynote of the Christian system sounding in the dim depths of remote antiquity. That bondage in Egypt referred to a still deeper and more degrading slavery of the spirit. That redemption was the foreshadow of a far greater deliverance. The slain lamb and its sprinkled blood pointed to a meeker, purer, and higher **SACRIFICE**, whose body was broken and blood shed for the remission of our sins.

3. The next was the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**, which was a continuation of the Passover on the next day. The Passover refers to what Christ does and is to the believer, and the other refers to what the true believer does in return. The one refers to our redemption by blood and our deliverance from condemnation; the other to our repentance and consecration to a new life of obedience, separated

from the **Leaven (sin)** of unrighteousness. It is therefore plain why both were thus joined together as one. Redemption is nothing to us if it does not lead us to our purification from the filthy ways and associations of the wicked. We can only effectually keep the gospel feast by purging out the old **Leaven (sin)** of malice and wickedness. For seven days this Feast of Un**Leavened** Bread is kept—a full period of time. We are to “*serve **GOD** in righteousness and holiness all the days of our life.*” Our work is not done until the week of our stay in this world ends. We must be faithful until death.

4. **First Fruits** - Joined with the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread was the additional service of presenting before **GOD** the first sheaf of the barley harvest. “This,” says Cumming, “was a beautiful institution, to teach the Israelites that it was not the soil, nor the raindrops, nor the sunbeams, nor the dews, nor the skill of their agriculturists, that they had to thank for their bounteous produce; but that they must rise above the sower and reaper, and see **GOD**, the Giver of the golden harvest, and make **HIS** praise the keynote to their harvest-time.” It was all this, but it also had a deeper and more beautiful meaning. The broad field, sowed with good seed, with its golden ears ripening for the harvest, is Christ’s own chosen figure of **HIS** kingdom upon earth, and the congregation of **HIS** believing children maturing for the garner of eternal life. In that field the chief sheaf is **JESUS** Christ Himself; for **HE** was in all respects “made like unto **HIS** brethren.” **HE** is the “firstfruits.” **HE** was gathered first, and received into the treasure-house of heaven. It was the Passover time when **HE** came to perfect ripeness. It was during these solemnities that **HE** was “cut off.” And when the **SPIRIT** of **GOD** lifted **HIM** from the sepulchre, and the heavens opened to receive **HIM**, then did the waving of the sheaf of firstfruits have its truest and highest fulfilment. Until this sheaf was thus offered along with the blood of atonement there could be no harvest for us.
5. **Feast of Pentecost (Feast of Weeks)** There was another harvest, and another festival service connected with its opening, fifty days later than the barley harvest. This was the wheat harvest, at which was celebrated the **Feast of Weeks**, otherwise called **Pentecost**. The Passover shows us Christ crucified; the sheaf of firstfruits shows us Christ raised from the dead and lifted up to heaven as our forerunner; and the Pentecostal feast, with its two leavened loaves, shows us Christ in the gracious influences of **HIS** Spirit wrought into the hearts and lives of those who constitute **HIS** earthly Church. This spiritual kneading took its highest and most active form on that memorable Pentecost when the disciples “were all with one accord in one place,” and the Holy Spirit came down upon them with gifts of mighty power. Three thousand souls were that day added to the Church, It was a glad and glorious day for Christianity. **They were** the firstfruits of wheat harvest brought with joyous thanksgiving unto **GOD**. But it was only the firstfruits—the earnest of a vast and plenteous harvest of the same kind ripening on the same fields. From that point forward, the world was to be filled with glad reapers gathering in the sheaves, and with labourers kneading the contents of those sheaves into loaves (**unbelievers into believers**) for **GOD**. **Even though there was previously sin** in those loaves; but, presented along with the blood of the chief of the flock and herd (**JESUS**), they still become acceptable to **HIM** who ordained the service. There was a peculiar requirement connected with these laws for the wheat, harvest well worthy of special attention. The corners of the fields and the gleanings were to be left. This was a beautiful feature in these arrangements. It presents a good lesson, of which we should

never to lose sight. But it was also a type. Of what, I have not seen satisfactorily explained, though the application seems easy. If the wheat harvest refers to the gathering of men from sin to Christianity, and from subjects of satan to subjects of grace, then the plain indication of this provision is that the entire world, under this present dispensation, shall not be completely converted to **GOD. I believe**

that the practical merciful care of all should be considered, constantly reminding all believers to care about ALL OF THE COMMUNITY, great and small, rich and poor.

6. Feast of Trumpets - The Feast of Trumpets marked the beginning of ten days of consecration and repentance before God. It is one of seven Jewish feasts or festivals appointed by the LORD and one of three feasts that occur in the autumn. The Feast of Trumpets began on the first day (at the new moon) of the seventh month. Its name comes from the command to blow trumpets ([Leviticus 23:24](#); [Numbers 29:1-6](#)). It is also called *Rosh Hashanah*, which means “Head of the Year,” because it marks the beginning of the Jewish civil calendar. During this celebration, no kind of work was to be performed, but burnt offerings and a sin offering were to be brought before the Lord. There is belief that it alternately means that the “trumpet” is simply an organizing instrument. See I Corinthians 14:8, 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.

7. Day of Atonement - An objection sometimes arises that the paschal sacrifice was not considered an atonement; rather, atonement was provided for the Jews via the sacrifices on [Yom Kippur \(the Day of Atonement\)](#). Ergo, so the objection goes, **JESUS**, who was killed at Passover and who is called “our Passover” in the New Testament, could not have been an atonement for sin.

There are two ways to counter this objection. The first is simply to show how **JESUS** also fulfilled the symbolism of Yom Kippur. **JESUS** bore our sins in His own body ([1 Peter 2:24](#)) and tasted death for everyone ([Hebrews 2:9](#)). In doing so, He offered a better sacrifice than those of Yom Kippur—better because Christ’s sacrifice was permanent and voluntary and did not just cover sin but removed it altogether ([Hebrews 9:8-14](#)).

The second counter is to point out that Jewish tradition did indeed view the Passover sacrifice as being expiatory; that is, the lamb removed sin from God’s view. The Passover lamb died under God’s outpoured wrath, thus covering over the sins of the one offering it. Here’s what Rashi, a well-respected medieval Jewish commentator, has to say: “I see the Paschal blood and propitiate you. . . . I mercifully take pity on you by means of the Paschal blood and the blood of circumcision, and I propitiate your souls” (Ex. R. 15, 35b, 35a).

During the tenth and final plague in Egypt, the Passover sacrifice literally saved individuals from death ([Exodus 12:23](#)). On the basis of the redemptive offering of the Passover blood, the firstborn lived. Again, Rashi comments: “It is as if a king said to his sons: ‘Know you that I judge persons on capital charges and condemn them. Give me therefore a present, so that in case you are brought before my judgment seat I may set aside the indictments against you.’ So God said to Israel: ‘I am now concerned with death penalties, but I will tell you how I will have pity on you and for the sake of the Passover blood and the circumcision blood I will atone for you’” (Ex. R. 15.12, on [Exodus 12.10](#)).

The Passover lambs brought atonement to the believing Jewish households on that signal night of judgment and redemption. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra also links the Passover with atonement: “The mark of blood was designed as an atonement

for those within the house who partook of the paschal offering, and was also a sign for the [destroying angel](#) to pass by the house” (*Soncino Chumash*, pg. 388).

When John the Baptist saw Christ, he pointed to Him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” ([John 1:29](#)). **JESUS** is the “Passover lamb” in that He was silent before His accusers ([Isaiah 53:7](#)) and in His death bore the wrath of God, preserved the lives of all who trust Him, and gave freedom to the former slaves of sin

8. Feast of Tabernacles (Booths) - The Feast of Tabernacles, also known as the Feast of Booths and *Sukkot*, is the seventh and last feast that the Lord commanded Israel to observe and one of the three feasts that Jews were to observe each year by going to “appear before the Lord your God in the place which He shall choose” ([Deuteronomy 16:16](#)). The importance of the Feast of Tabernacles can be seen in how many places it is mentioned in Scripture. In the Bible we see many important events that took place at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. For one thing, it was at this time that [Solomon’s Temple](#) was dedicated to the Lord ([1 Kings 8:2](#)).

It was at the Feast of Tabernacles that the Israelites, who had returned to rebuild the temple, gathered to celebrate under the leadership of Joshua and Zerubbabel ([Ezra 3](#)). Later, the Jews heard Ezra read the Word of God to them during the Feast of Tabernacles ([Nehemiah 8](#)). Ezra’s preaching resulted in a great revival as the Israelites confessed and repented of their sins. It was also during this Feast that Jesus said, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” ([John 7:37–39](#)).

The Feast of Tabernacles takes place on the 15th of the Hebrew month Tishri. This was the seventh month on the [Hebrew calendar](#) and usually occurs in late September to mid-October. The feast begins five days after the Day of Atonement and at the time the fall harvest had just been completed. It was a time of joyous celebration as the Israelites celebrated God’s continued provision for them in the current harvest and remembered His provision and protection during the 40 years in the wilderness.

As one of the three feasts that all “native born” male Jews were commanded to participate in, the Feast of Tabernacles is mentioned multiple times in Scripture, sometimes called the Feast of the Ingathering, the Feast to the Lord, or the Feast of Booths ([Exodus 23:16](#); [Deuteronomy 16:13](#)). As one of the pilgrim feasts (when Jewish males were commanded to go to Jerusalem), it was also the time when they brought their tithes and offerings to the Temple ([Deuteronomy 16:16](#)). With the influx of people coming to Jerusalem at that time, we can only imagine what the scene must have been like. Thousands upon thousands of people coming together to remember and celebrate God’s deliverance and His provision, all living in temporary shelters or booths as part of the requirements of the feast. During the eight-day period, so many sacrifices were made that it required all twentyfour divisions of priests to be present to assist in the sacrificial duties.

We find God’s instructions for celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles in [Leviticus 23](#), given at a point in history right after God had delivered Israel from bondage

in Egypt. The feast was to be celebrated each year on “the fifteenth day of this seventh month” and was to run for seven days ([Leviticus 23:34](#)). Like all feasts, it begins with a “holy convocation” or Sabbath day when the Israelites were to stop working to set aside the day for worshiping God. On each day of the feast they were to offer an “offering made by fire to the Lord” and then after seven days of feasting, again the eighth day was to be “a holy convocation” when they were to cease from work and offer another sacrifice to God ([Leviticus 23](#)). Lasting eight days, the Feast of Tabernacles begins and ends with a Sabbath day of rest. During the eight days of the feast, the Israelites would dwell in booths or tabernacles that were made from the branches of trees ([Leviticus 23:40–42](#)).

The Feast of Tabernacles, like all the feasts, was instituted by God as a way of reminding Israelites in every generation of their deliverance by God from Egypt. Of course, the feasts are also significant in that they foreshadow the work and actions of the coming Messiah. Much of Jesus’ public ministry took place in conjunction with the Holy Feasts set forth by God.

The three pilgrim feasts where all Jewish males were commanded to “appear before the Lord in the place he chooses” are each very important in regards to the life of Christ and His work of redemption. We know with certainty that the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are symbolic of Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross. Likewise, we know that Pentecost, which marked the beginning of the Feast of Weeks, was the time of Jesus’ bodily ascension. And most scholars would agree that the Feast of Tabernacles is symbolic of Christ’s [Second Coming](#) when He will establish His earthly kingdom.

There are also some who believe that it was likely during the Feast of Tabernacles that Jesus was born. While we celebrate Christ’s birth on [December 25](#), most scholars acknowledge that this tradition was begun in the fourth century AD by the Roman Catholic Church and that the exact day of Jesus’ birth is unknown. Some of the evidence that Jesus might have been born earlier in the year during the Feast of the Tabernacles includes the fact that it would be unlikely for shepherds to still be in the field with their sheep in December, which is in the middle of the winter, but it would have been likely they were in the fields tending sheep at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. The strong possibility that Jesus was born at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles is also seen in the words John wrote in [John 1:14](#). “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” The word John chose to speak of Jesus “dwelling” among us is the word *tabernacle*, which simply means to “dwell in a tent.”

Some believe it is very likely that John intentionally used this word to associate the first coming of Christ with the Feast of Tabernacles. Christ came in the flesh to dwell among us for a temporary time when He was born in the manger, and He is coming again to dwell among us as Lord of Lords. While it cannot be established with certainty that Jesus was born during the Feast of Tabernacles, some believe there is a strong possibility the Feast of Tabernacles not only looks forward to His second coming but also reflects back on His first coming.

The Feast of Tabernacles begins and ends with a special Sabbath day of rest.

During the days of the feast all native Israelites were “to dwell in booths” to remind them that God delivered them out of the “land of Egypt” and to look forward to the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, who would deliver His people from the bondage of sin. This feast, like all of the feasts of Israel, consistently reminded the Jews and should remind Christians as well that God has promised to deliver His people from the bondage of sin and deliver them from their enemies. Part of God’s deliverance for the Israelites was His provision and protection of them for the 40 years they wandered in the wilderness, cut off from the Promised Land. The same holds true for Christians today. God protects us and provides for us as we go through life in the wilderness of this world. While our hearts long for the Promised Land (heaven) and to be in the presence of God, He preserves us in this world as we await the world to come and the redemption that will come when Jesus Christ returns again to “tabernacle” or dwell among us in bodily form.

Bonus Questions: Should Followers of CHRIST continue to have annual celebrations?

The Jewish Calendar

<u>Month</u>	<u>Gregorian Calendar</u>	<u>Biblical Reference</u>
1 Nisan (Abib)	March-April	Exodus 13:4
2 Lyyar (Ziv)	April-May	1 Kings 6:1, 37
3 Sivan	May-June	Esther 8:9
4 Tammuz	June-July	
5 Av	July-August	
6 Elul	August-September	Nehemiah 6:15
7 Tishri (Ethaniam)	September-October	1 Kings 8:2
8 Marcheshvan (Bui)	October-November	1 Kings 6:38
9 Kislev	November-December	Nehemiah 1:1
10 Tebeth	December-January	Esther 2:16
11 Shebat	January-February	Zechariah 1:7
12 Adar	February-March	Esther 2:7

The Jewish calendar, being lunar-based, invariably began with the new moon. To make up for the shorter year (compared to solar-based calendars), an extra month was periodically inserted between the months Adar and Nisan. That month, sometimes called Veader (“second Adar”), was added seven times within a 19-year cycle (at which time the month Adar received an extra half day).

The names of the months in the Jewish calendar originated in the period following the return from Babylonia to Israel. Before the Babylonian exile, at least four months had other names: Abib ([Exodus 13:4](#)), Ziv ([1 Kings 6:1, 37](#)), Ethaniam ([1 Kings 8:2](#)), and Bul ([1 Kings 6:38](#)). After the Captivity, these months were renamed Nisan, lyyar, Tishri, and Heshvan (originally Marcheshvan), respectively. The pre-exilic names carried agricultural connotations. For example, *Abib* (“ear of grain”) signified the month in which grain became ripe; *Ziv* (“radiance”) was the month for desert flowers to bloom. An agricultural orientation is apparent in what is evidently the oldest Hebrew calendar, found at Gezer (southeast of Tel Aviv) in 1908 and dating from the

10th century BC. The calendar divides the year according to agricultural activities such as sowing, reaping, pruning, and storage.

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Primarily, however, the months of the Jewish calendar had religious significance for the Jews and enabled them to commemorate the important events of their history. Each month's beginning was considered holy. To ancient Israel, the moon became a symbol of the nation itself; the sun eventually became symbolic of the Messiah ([Malachi 4:2](#)). Since the moon produces no light of its own, the symbolism is especially appropriate: Israel was supposed to reflect the Messiah's light to the world.

The Jewish calendar remained unchanged during [the period between the Old Testament and New Testaments](#) (approximately 400 years), despite an attempt by Hellenistic rulers to introduce a modified lunar-month system, presumably of Macedonian origin. According to that calendar, five days were added to the final month of the year, with each of the 12 months containing 30 days. Even then, it only approximated the solar year.

Usually, the ancient Hebrews did not record dates by citing the month and day of an event. Rather, dates were computed by reference to some significant event such as the accession year of the reigning king ([2 Kings 15:17](#)) or a patriarch's birth ([Genesis 7:11](#)). In New Testament times, the Jews continued the Old Testament method of dating events by synchronizing them with events either in their religious calendar or within the secular sphere of the Roman world. Writers of the New Testament followed the same practice ([Luke 1:5](#); [John 12:1](#); [Acts 18:12](#)). It was only as the calendar reforms of Julius Caesar became embedded in the culture that people changed from that long-standing method to a more standardized system.

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Lunar Calendar - A lunar calendar is a system of timekeeping that is based on the monthly cycles of the Moon's phases, or synodic months. A lunar calendar differs from a solar calendar, which is based on the movement of the Earth around the sun and the seasons. A lunar calendar may need to add extra days periodically to keep in sync with the solar year.

ii

Solar Calendar - A solar calendar is a calendar whose dates indicate the season or almost equivalently the apparent position of the Sun relative to the stars. The Gregorian calendar (*implemented on February 24, 1582 by Pope Gregory XIII*), widely accepted as a standard in the world, is an example of a solar calendar. **iii**

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