

Leviticus Bible Study #27

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Leviticus 23:1-22

1 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **2** “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, These are the appointed feasts of the LORD that you shall proclaim as holy convocations; they are my appointed feasts.

3 “Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the Lord in all your dwelling places.

4 “These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them. **5** In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD's Passover. **6** And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. **7** On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. **8** But you shall present a food offering to the LORD for seven days. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work.”

9 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **10** “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, **11** and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. **12** And on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering to the LORD. **13** And the grain offering with it shall be two tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, a food offering to the LORD with a pleasing aroma, and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, a fourth of a hin. **14** And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

15 “You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. **16** You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD. **17** You shall bring from your dwelling places two loaves of bread to be waved, made of two tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour, and they shall be baked with leaven, as firstfruits to the LORD. **18** And you shall present with the bread seven lambs a year old without blemish, and one bull from the herd and two rams. They shall be a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. **19** And you shall offer one male goat for a sin offering, and two male lambs a year old as a sacrifice of peace offerings. **20** And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the LORD for the priest. **21** And you shall make a proclamation on the same day. You shall hold a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work. It is a statute forever in all your dwelling places throughout your generations.

22 “And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.”

Introduction

Moses has communicated the Divinely ordained purity code for both laity and the priesthood.

Now it is time to speak on the festivals wherein the people will be gathered for worship. This requires a liturgical calendar, with weekly worship being the veritable heartbeat of the Israelite nation. Not only does this ensure that the priests and Levites were able to implement their directives to teach the people and perform sacrifices, but here also Leviticus forms the basis for both modern Church calendars and the weekly services we attend as well.

Vs.1-3

1 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, These are the appointed feasts of the LORD that you shall proclaim as holy convocations; they are my appointed feasts.

3 “Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the Lord in all your dwelling places.

The word “feast” is not meant to suggest celebration in the sense that we would use the word today. The Lord uses the term **מוֹעֵד**,¹² which is more directly translated as “appointment.” This is to say, God commands that these *appointed times* are observed, wherein the people present themselves before Him. While our Lord is omnipresent and is thus always with humanity, there is a qualitative difference when He is among us to receive our worship, praise, and dutiful learning of His Word. In sum, God wants people to spend *time* with Him, and under the Old Covenant this was strictly enforced.

This begins with the Sabbath, which had already been commanded at Sinai as the Third Commandment. The people know that they are to rest on the Sabbath Day every week, for God rested on the seventh day after creating the universe.³ But this is not merely rest for its own sake, but rather rest which includes a *convocation*; the word **מִקְרָא**⁴⁵ which includes with it a connotation of calling and assembly. “Going to Church” once a week is not a recent invention, nor even a tradition started by the Apostles, but rather it was started here. The people were commanded to gather on the Sabbath, where presumably the priests and Levites would teach them the Law as God commanded Aaron after Nadab and Abihu's death.⁶

There is a persistent belief that the synagogue model of worship began during the Babylonian Exile in the seventh century B.C. as a means of coping with Judah's loss of access to the Temple. This is a misrepresentation of the development though, as Israelites had been gathering on the Sabbath for worship, prayer, and learning for close to a thousand years by that point. It is more accurate to say that the synagogue model of worship, prayer and learning *at a designated building* was prompted by the Exile. Prior to then, the people had plenty of designated locations to choose from (houses, fields, etc.), where they would learn directly from the Levites and priests. The rabbinic synagogue is not inventing something *new*, but modifying something already in place.

This means that contrary to what rabbinic thought or modern historical conceptions may suggest, the Church's weekly meetings and liturgical calendar find their foundation here in the Law of Moses. The reasoning is simple: though Christ fulfilled the Law, we are still the true Israel of God, and thus follow the basic yearly rhythm established by this chapter of Leviticus. Only now, we have changed out the festivals, from things like the Passover and Firstfruits to Easter and Christmas, to reflect the New Covenant. The Law of Moses looked *forward* to Christ's ministry and the Atonement through its festivals; Christians under the New Covenant have festivals that look *backward* to these things.

1 Transliterated “Moed,” Strong's #4150

2 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/4150.htm>

3 Exodus 20:8-11

4 Transliterated “Mikra,” Strong's #4744

5 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/4744.htm>

6 Leviticus 10:10-11

Vs.4-8

4 “These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them. **5** In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD's Passover. **6** And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. **7** On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. **8** But you shall present a food offering to the LORD for seven days. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work.”

While every Sabbath was an appointed day for gathering and worshiping, there were also specific days or periods of time that we would call *holidays* in the modern vernacular. The first of these holidays are Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which receive little detail in this passage. This is on account of Moses already having written on the topic in detail in the book of Exodus,⁷ although later he re-states the instructions in Deuteronomy.⁸ Still, he includes the *date*, the anniversary of the Exodus itself, as crucial to the establishment of the liturgical calendar. The “ordinary” work, or usual day-to-day activities of an Israelite, is prohibited during this holiday. The specification of “ordinary” acts of service is a matter of concession for the roasting of the lamb, making arrangements for the pilgrims who gather for the holiday, etc. Otherwise, the remembrance of the Passover and the unleavened bread are to be done in such a manner as to refresh the believer in their celebration.

Vs.9-14

9 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **10** “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, **11** and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. **12** And on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering to the LORD. **13** And the grain offering with it shall be two tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, a food offering to the LORD with a pleasing aroma, and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, a fourth of a hin. **14** And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

These commands regarding the feast of firstfruits assume that the Israelites were going to form an agricultural society. Not only that, but one which was prosperous enough for the average farmer to wait until he had made an offering before eating any of the grain that he harvested. While firstfruits is a festival of celebration, namely that God had given the nation their harvest for the year, it is also an expression of faith. The Israelites are to thank God for their food, yet also trust His provision enough to give the first sheaf, as well as a grain offering and a drink offering and a lamb as a burnt offering.

The sacrifice of a lamb here is Christological in nature.⁹ The children of Israel cannot enjoy their daily bread until a spotless lamb has been offered to our Heavenly Father. One must note as well that such a year-old lamb would not be there to sacrifice in the first place if it were not for the provisions which made for his birth and growth; in other words, the believers were to sacrifice a lamb that *God provided*. And with the eleventh verse, it is this offering which is part of the rite which makes the Israelite acceptable before God. The typology is clear, for Christ's atoning death on the Cross makes us acceptable before our Lord, that we may enjoy the fruits of His provision on our behalf.

Vs.15-22

15 “You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. **16** You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a

⁷ Exodus 12-13

⁸ Deuteronomy 16:1-8

⁹ This is absolutely true of *all* the feast days, but the Passover has been covered much more than these others.

grain offering of new grain to the LORD. **17** You shall bring from your dwelling places two loaves of bread to be waved, made of two tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour, and they shall be baked with leaven, as firstfruits to the LORD. **18** And you shall present with the bread seven lambs a year old without blemish, and one bull from the herd and two rams. They shall be a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. **19** And you shall offer one male goat for a sin offering, and two male lambs a year old as a sacrifice of peace offerings. **20** And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the LORD for the priest. **21** And you shall make a proclamation on the same day. You shall hold a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work. It is a statute forever in all your dwelling places throughout your generations.

22 “And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.”

This feast of weeks is also called “Pentecost,” which means “fiftieth” from its Greek derivation. Here the observances of the feast of firstfruits are amplified: instead of a bit of grain from the harvest, now the *product* of the wheat and barley – bread – is offered alongside grain and drink offerings, with thirteen animal sacrifices instead of one. Whereas the firstfruits offering signified trust, the offerings of Pentecost constitute a grand celebration. If Firstfruits foreshadowed the Atonement, then Pentecost points to both the Resurrection and the day the Holy Spirit arrived to help the Church after Christ's Ascension.¹⁰ One notes here that there are thirteen animal sacrifices in total, with one sin offering alongside two peace offerings. The people are presented before the Lord in one convocation, celebrating because God has provided for them and established peace between the Divine and mankind while forgiving their sins. But the thirteen animals is a conspicuous number which does not follow the standard numbering conventions of the Law thus far. Such anomalies usually point us to a typological fulfillment in the Gospels. Typically, the numbers seen most often are singular, in pairs, or at most twelve (representing the tribes of Israel). With this addition, it is best understood as a foreshadowing of the twelve Apostles and Christ – who is the lone sin offering of the whole group.

Another anomalous inclusion would be the restatement of gleaning. It is no coincidence that the laws concerning gleaning are re-stated after the command to observe Pentecost.¹¹ The Israelites were to trust in God for their daily bread, both by offering the best of their firstfruits *and* leaving grain behind for the poor; they were thus to demonstrate faith on both ends of their harvest. Yet it is also typological, in that after the Church was more fully proclaimed and established at Pentecost in the first century, they immediately began works of mercy for the poor. The same way that the liturgical calendar of this chapter forms the basis for how the Church formed their calendar, so too does it influence our mission to engage in works of charity and mercy to others.

¹⁰ Acts 2

¹¹ The previous instance was Leviticus 19:9