

Leviticus Bible Study #28

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

Leviticus 23:23-44

23 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, **24** “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of solemn rest, a memorial proclaimed with blast of trumpets, a holy convocation. **25** You shall not do any ordinary work, and you shall present a food offering to the Lord.”

26 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, **27** “Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves and present a food offering to the Lord. **28** And you shall not do any work on that very day, for it is a Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the Lord your God. **29** For whoever is not afflicted on that very day shall be cut off from his people. **30** And whoever does any work on that very day, that person I will destroy from among his people. **31** You shall not do any work. It is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwelling places. **32** It shall be to you a Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict yourselves. On the ninth day of the month beginning at evening, from evening to evening shall you keep your Sabbath.”

33 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, **34** “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, On the fifteenth day of this seventh month and for seven days is the Feast of Booths to the Lord. **35** On the first day shall be a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. **36** For seven days you shall present food offerings to the Lord. On the eighth day you shall hold a holy convocation and present a food offering to the Lord. It is a solemn assembly; you shall not do any ordinary work.

37 “These are the appointed feasts of the Lord, which you shall proclaim as times of holy convocation, for presenting to the Lord food offerings, burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each on its proper day, **38** besides the Lord's Sabbaths and besides your gifts and besides all your vow offerings and besides all your freewill offerings, which you give to the Lord.

39 “On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the Lord seven days. On the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest. **40** And you shall take on the first day the fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. **41** You shall celebrate it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year. It is a statute forever throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. **42** You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, **43** that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”

44 Thus Moses declared to the people of Israel the appointed feasts of the Lord.

Introduction

There are seven appointed feasts in the Mosaic Law: Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement, and Booths. As nothing in the Law is written by accident or coincidence, this number is important to note. There are seven days of Creation, and accordingly seven days to the week. The Sabbath is on the *seventh* day of the week, the Passover is on the fourteenth day of the first month, the feasts of Unleavened Bread and Booths last seven days, Pentecost is after the

seventh Sabbath from the feast of firstfruits, and the latter three feasts are on the seventh month of the year. One is under the impression that for the God who sits enthroned near seven lampstands by His seven-sealed decree of salvation, whose Lamb has seven horns and seven eyes, and whose Spirit is sevenfold,¹ this is an important number. It is understood to be a number of *completion*, making the number of festivals appropriate to what the Israelites are celebrating: the totality of the faith, culminating in the Person and Work of our Lord Jesus. Let us discuss the last three feasts, wherein this typological dynamic is made even more explicit.

Vs.23-25

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There is little detail given for how exactly the feast of Trumpets was to be observed. In the book of Numbers God gives further instructions regarding the offerings to be made, but that is all.² But the trumpet itself served an important function in Israelite society, one which calls to memory their experiences in the wilderness. It was the single most effective tool available for organizing and moving the nation. A trumpet alerts the people to move, calls the people to battle, celebrates their triumphs, leads their retreat, and announces the arrival of the King. Christ teaches us that a trumpet call shall be used on the day of His Return to gather the Church together,³ just as trumpets were used during the Israelite sojourn.

The date of the festival is in the beginning of the seventh month, ten days before the Day of Atonement. Traditionally this has been understood as a call for the devout to prepare themselves for the self-affliction and penitence to be observed before their sins were forgiven, making it a precursor to typical Palm Sunday celebrations, which are all about when Christ entered Jerusalem before His Passion. Presumably, the early Church engaged in fasts or afflictions during Passion Week, but over time the period of penitence was shifted to the forty days before Easter. In this way, believers are invited to relate to Christ's desert sojourn.⁴

Vs.26-32

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While the priests are fulfilling their sacred obligations on the Day of Atonement,⁵ the people are instructed to afflict themselves. This is not necessarily *fasting* per se, as the individual Israelite had some freedom to choose what he would do. The word translated for self affliction is **עָנָה**,^{6,7} which has a primary meaning of lowering, chastening, or humbling. The range of activities this involved could be

1 Revelation 2:1, 4:5, 5:1, 5:6, etc.

2 Numbers 29:1-6

3 Matthew 24:31

4 Matthew 4:1-17

5 Leviticus 16

6 Transliterated “Anah,” Strong's #6031

7 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/6031.htm>

seen with things like wearing sackcloth,⁸ fasting,⁹ pouring ashes on one's head,¹⁰ and generally expressing less care for oneself so as to debase one's own pride. The same way individual Christians may choose a Lenten sacrifice or discipline to tame their fleshly desires, the Israelite would likely choose whatever suited his spiritual needs best – or the head of household would choose the discipline for his family.

Israelites would do this for various occasions like penitence or mourning, but here the congregation are told to do this *collectively*. This is a jarring statute at first, in that one would expect a people experiencing forgiveness to be rejoicing. But the people were observing as animals died for them, and as the scapegoat was castigated. They were to humble themselves in the recognition that another living creature was taking the punishment and wrath which they deserved. Herein of course is a strong connection to the *true* Day of Atonement that is Good Friday. The Church has of course carried the same tradition regarding affliction and penitence on Good Friday that the Israelites observed on the Day of Atonement.

Vs.33-44

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If the Day of Atonement was equivalent to our Good Friday, then the Feast of Booths is equivalent to our Easter. While more produce is brought in from further harvests, the people do not simply make offerings as they did for Firstfruits or Pentecost. Instead, the people are to gather together and rejoice for seven days straight while surrounded by “splendid trees” - a show of abundance and verdant growth. This is one week out of the year wherein the people are not only commanded to live by the Edenic ideal: now they are given the opportunity to *enjoy it*. They are to live as though they are in Eden while staying in tents and enjoying much needed rest.

The timing of the festival is just five days after the Day of Atonement, with the message certainly not being lost on the Christian reader. Atonement required sacrifice so the peoples' sins could be forgiven. What does being forgiven entail? This feast answers the question with rest, plenty, rejoicing, fellowship, and a sense of being surrounded by life itself as they commune with our Lord. In other words, since the Day of Atonement shows the Israelites a typological message of what Christ was

⁸ Genesis 37:34, 2 Samuel 3:31, 1 Kings 21:20-29

⁹ Ezra 8:21, with a notable chapter on the topic being Isaiah 58

¹⁰ 2 Samuel 13:19, Job 2:8, 42:6

to accomplish on the Cross, the feast of Booths shows them what Jesus does for us *ultimately*, namely a return to the Edenic state and eternal blessed life.

Our Lord reminds them that they are to observe this holiday to remember their wilderness wanderings, wherein after the Exodus they dwelt in tents. Despite being outside of their homes, they are to rejoice. This as well is typological, as the Church sojourns in the wilderness of this world until Christ returns, yet rejoices as if it had already happened. Note too that the Israelites were in tents as Moses presented this command. This means that even before they arrived in the Promised Land, they were to spend a week in booths conducting themselves as though they were already there; the “already but not yet” dynamic of eschatology is present even as far back as Leviticus was being written.