

Leviticus – Part 5

Feasting on God's Promises (Leviticus 23-27)

From beginning to end, the Bible is all about the reconciliation of man to God through Jesus, the Messiah. One of the ways that God chooses to reveal more about the Messiah is through His feasts. Although given by God in the Old Testament, both the first coming of Jesus that brought salvation, and His return in the second coming that will take us to heaven, are foreshadowed in these feasts. More than just traditions, these feasts show Jesus' fulfillment of God's promises and guide us into a deeper understanding of His grace, provision, and ultimately, His restoration.

The feasts provide a two-fold purpose: 1) To the nation of Israel, they were object lessons to remind them how merciful and gracious God had been to them, and 2) to the Church, they provide a beautiful picture of Christ and a prophetic timetable for what was to come. In a literal manner, Christ fulfilled the spring feasts and Pentecost at His first coming, but He has not yet fulfilled the fall feasts. That will begin to happen at Jesus' second coming. Sandwiched between Jesus' comings is the Church Age in which we live. The Holy Spirit has come to indwell believers, bringing to us God's constant presence, on the Day of Pentecost.

The feasts were divided into three seasons so the Jewish men must travel each time to the central place of worship as God commanded. (Ex. 23:14-17). This would later be Jerusalem. The three spring feasts, connected to the spring harvest, are observed during Nisan/Abib (March/April) and are closely related. Even though the Feast of Unleavened Bread and Firstfruits are individual feasts, they are observed over eight consecutive days with Passover, so they are sometimes lumped together as "Passover." The second season begins fifty days later in the Jewish month of Sivan (May/June). It contains only the Feast of Pentecost, also known as *Shavuot*, or the Feast of Weeks.

In the last season, three feasts connected to the fall harvest are held: the Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah), the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), and the Feast of Tabernacles (Succoth). They, too, are closely related. This celebration is held in Tishri, (September/October) the seventh month of the Jewish calendar.

God gives instructions for all seven feasts in one chapter, Leviticus 23. This made it easier for Israel to remember the purpose of each one and to know how to perform them. Any error would mean banishment! Today, with no temple and no sacrifices, these feasts are observed in an altered form because it is impossible to celebrate them according to the "letter of the Law." Israel's understanding of the prophetic implications is blurred, but the feasts continue to be celebrated with solemn, yet joyous enthusiasm because of God's mercy and never-failing provision.

I. Spring

Leviticus 23 begins with the Lord telling Moses these were "feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are **My** feasts." To observe these as a "holy convocation" meant they were expected to regularly set apart a time to publicly assemble in worship to God. God then describes the Sabbath as a weekly assembly and seven yearly feasts that the Jews were to celebrate. These feasts were not low-key, somber events, but celebrations! God says, "Once a week, and seven

times every year, until the end of time, you are to celebrate our relationship wherever there is a community of Jews.”

Before God gave his people the details of these festivals, He reminded them of the Sabbath of rest, setting a day apart each week unto God for worship. “Sabbath of **Rest!**” This was a gift, not an obligation. Every seventh day was a time to sit back, relax, enjoy the family, and worship Him. Even today, Jews in Israel take this day of rest seriously. Families dress a little nicer and parents often buy little gifts or toys for their kids on their way home from work on Friday. Most men buy flowers for their wives for the Sabbath. In more affluent Jewish communities, families often go to a fancy hotel for their Sabbath dinner and let the Gentiles do the cooking!

In the excitement of the annual festivals, God did not want the people to forget the importance of weekly worship. No travel was required like that for the feasts; they celebrated Sabbath at home. This should remind those who only attend church at Christmas and Easter that *weekly* church attendance is necessary! (Lev. 23:3; Heb. 10:24). In comparing the restriction of the Jew's weekly worship, “ye shall do *no work* therein” to the feasts “ye shall do *no servile work* [ordinary work] therein,” the weekly stoppage of work had a greater emphasis than the holidays.

God begins the **Passover** feast at twilight on the 14th day of the first month of the Jewish month Nisan/Abib (March/April to us). (Remember, their day begins in the evening when ours start in the morning.) In Exodus 12, the Passover began in the evening before the Sabbath. While only one verse is devoted here to Passover (Lev. 23:5), it is covered in great detail in two other places. (Ex. 12; Deut. 16).

This feast was first observed before the final plague was delivered on the Egyptians so Pharaoh would release the Jews from slavery. (Ex. 12:1-8). The firstborn of those who were behind the doors marked with blood were spared from death. This **remembrance** marked the beginning of their journey to freedom. It put responsibility on the parents to teach their children about God's power and faithfulness to His people as He brought them out of bondage.

The next day, the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** began and would continue for seven days. During this week, only unleavened bread was eaten. The celebration remembers the haste with which they were driven out of Egypt. There was no time for their bread to rise so they ate only unleavened bread until God provided manna.

Yeast/leaven represents sin, so to prepare for this celebration, the house is cleaned and everything scrubbed to spotless perfection; not a speck of dirt must be found in the kitchen, the bedrooms, or any other area. Some people even use special dishes and buy all new clothes for the week. Whatever is needed to rid the leaven from their homes is done to make themselves acceptable to God. (I Cor. 5:6-8).

Some feel they must “make themselves clean” to be acceptable enough to come to Jesus for salvation, but Jesus says to come just as we are; He'll take care of the cleansing. None of us are worthy, but His blood cleanses us from our sins to make us worthy. (Eph. 1:7). After we give our life to Him, though, Jesus grabs the broom and starts cleaning. He **removes** the sinful things that keep us from fellowshiping with Him. That's “sanctification,” setting us apart, removing our sinful desires, and replacing them with the fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22-23).

“On the morrow after the Sabbath,” two days after Passover, the Feast of the First-fruits was celebrated. This marked the first day of harvest—but there is a qualification to this celebration: “*When you come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest*” (Lev. 23:10-11; Deut. 26:1-10). During their time in the wilderness, God’s people relied on manna from heaven for food. After entering the Promised Land, they were to celebrate this feast with thanksgiving for God’s faithfulness.

Farmers who plant the fields may understand this feast the best. Each year between October and December, they plant barley seeds. These rest beneath the soil until the spring breeze warms the soil. Soon the barley stalks begin to grow and fill out until they are ready to harvest. God required a “sheaf of the first grain,” the chief or best of the stalks, for Himself. With an emphasis on “first,” we can identify God’s expectations for our giving to Him as well.

Barley is a lighter grain that ripens more quickly than wheat, their other food staple, so it was the “first of the first fruit” offerings in the Jewish calendar. They brought their bundle of grain to the priest to offer a wave offering of the portion that belonged to God, the source of their bounty. Until this bundle was brought, the Israelites were not allowed to eat any of their new crops or even begin to harvest (Lev. 23:10-14). They continued to use their stores from previous years. It was an expression of faith that more was to follow. Without their sacrifice, future blessings would be hindered. God would not **return** the blessing when they withheld their best from Him.

Along with the first fruits, the priest would offer a burnt offering of a perfect, year-old lamb, a grain offering of about a peck of fine flour mixed with oil for a sweet savor to God, and a drink offering (a quart) of wine. This acknowledged that it was through God’s blessing that they had been rescued from slavery in Egypt and had a land to live in and grow crops.

God demanded the first fruits, not the leftovers. They understood... but it would still have been hard. Obedience requires us to act on our faith in the Lord’s ability to provide. Considering these Israelites had wandered for forty years before entering and putting down roots in the Promised Land, it would have been hard to give up even that first bit of abundance! Giving up the best of one’s crops anytime, but especially during hard times like famine, locusts, drought, etc., before even getting to sample them, could have been a challenge for some.

These three feasts foreshadowed Christ, God’s very best. The Passover shows Jesus as the Perfect Lamb (I Cor. 5:7), sacrificed because He alone had the power to release us from the bondage of sin. The Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ps. 16:10) shows His sinlessness and foreshadows His burial. Finally, on the third day, Jesus resurrects from the dead, “Christ the firstfruits; afterward, they that are Christ’s at His coming” (I Cor. 15:3-4, 20-23). These show God’s fulfilled promises.

II. Feast of Weeks

Without the Firstfruits, there was no way to Pentecost. “From the day you brought the sheaf” (v. 15), seven Sabbaths (or 49 days) must be completed before the Feast of Weeks/Shavuot/Pentecost. After that Sabbath, Sunday, the Feast of Pentecost would

be celebrated. This is the second of three “solemn feasts” that required all Jewish males to travel to Jerusalem. (Ex. 23:14-17; 34:22-23; Deut. 16:16).

Each of the three major feasts offered first fruits but with different crops. The Feast of Firstfruits was from the barley harvest. The first fruits of Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks, were from the wheat harvest, a greater harvest than the Firstfruits, but not as great as the fall harvest. In the fall, the first of the olive and grape harvests were offered at the Feast of Tabernacles.

Instead of the sheaf of grain used in the wave offering, for the Feast of Weeks they were to bring two wave loaves of bread, representing the Jews and Gentiles, made from the same quantity of fine flour (two tenth deals, 1 gallon) used in the grain offering of the spring Firstfruits. (Lev. 23:13-17). Along with the loaves of leavened bread, the priests would sacrifice seven perfect male lambs a year old, one young bull, and two rams as burnt offerings.

Romans 8:23 says that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the first fruits of the redemption God will bring to His creation in the form of the Church. We might consider that God has **rewarded** us as believers with His constant presence. These will be the leaven in the loaf, a cohesive unit sent out into the world to gradually bring the influence of God to the lost in it. When the harvest is ripe, the Lord will come to gather His harvest; He will return for His children. And then the fall feasts will begin.

III. Fall

The Feast of Trumpets, or Rosh Hashanah, celebrates the fall harvest, the largest harvest of the year, on the first day of the seventh month of Tishri. Like the Firstfruits, this feast can get lost in the shadow of the Day of Atonement. It is, however, a memorial proclaimed with a blast of trumpets, a remembrance of sin, and a time of confession for the next ten days. It called the people to prepare for the Day of Atonement as it calls us to prepare and be **ready** for the return of Christ.

The blowing of the Trumpets initiates the beginning of the feast. Jewish workers in the fields immediately stop harvesting and go up to the temple to worship; those who are not believers will continue with their harvesting. Matthew 24:40 reminds us that when Christ returns, “Two shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left”? What a picture of the Rapture of the Church, the next great event on God’s prophetic calendar. “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (I Thess. 4:16-17; Matt. 24:30-31; I Cor. 15:51-52). What a harvest! Will you be ready?

Every believer since Pentecost will be resurrected, bodily caught up in the air to meet Jesus. Many who tried to get there by doing good works, or have rejected Him altogether, will be left behind. (Matt. 7:23). Sadly, only a small amount of Israel will rise with us. “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved!” (Jer. 8:20).

After these ten days, the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, begins. (Lev. 23:24-28). On that day, the priest will make an offering to the Lord for the sin of the nation. It is the one day of the year that the High Priest is allowed to enter the Holy of Holies. Since we studied that in great detail in our last lesson, we will only touch lightly on it here. (Lev.

16). As a reminder though, on this day, the high priest brings two goats for the sins of the people: one was sacrificed and the other, the scapegoat, was sent away into the wilderness, bearing the sins of the people, and they were **redeemed**.

On this solemn feast day, the people were commanded to rest, take the time to “afflict themselves” (fast and repent), and recognize their need for cleansing. Only the priests had duties to perform. The people do nothing, nor do we contribute anything to our redemption. This foreshadowed Christ’s atoning work as our High Priest. His once-for-all sacrifice replaced the annual sacrifices of the Old Covenant (Hebrews 9:12). In Him, we have full atonement and reconciliation with God and will join Him when He calls us to heaven with the trumpets. Then, like the Israelites, we will celebrate! But for those who have not accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, the Day of Atonement is a prophetic picture of the Tribulation and judgment. All the world will be judged for rejecting their Messiah and purged. (Zech. 12:10-13:1; 6).

Five days later, on the fifteenth of the month, the final feast, the Feast of Tabernacles, is celebrated. (Lev. 23:33-43). It marks the completion of the whole harvest by the in-gathering of the grapes. This was an excellent time to reflect upon the goodness and grace of God in their lives, a time of thanksgiving.

When the Israelites came into the Promised Land, they would have homes to live in. But for the eight days of this feast, they were to build booths of tree branches, boards, and cloth, move out of the house, and live in this **room** outside their home. It would be a special remembrance of the hardships their ancestors endured to get to the Promised Land and how God preserved them through the forty years they wandered in the wilderness. It was a reminder that not too many years before, they were homeless. But for these eight days, they were to keep a feast, do no work, and live in tents. They were to rejoice and celebrate (v. 40-41)! What a party!

Since the fifteenth day didn’t necessarily land on a Sabbath day, there could actually be two additional Sabbath days during this period because the first day of the feast and the last day were always Sabbath days. All would be observed as any normal Sabbath day. By the way, have you noticed that no Mondays, Tuesdays, etc. are mentioned in Scripture? Only the Sabbath is a recognized day; everything else has a number (the first day, the tenth day, the fourteenth day, etc. of the month).

This feast also pictures a future event, the Millennial Kingdom of Christ, the ultimate dwelling of God with His people. Christ will provide shelter during His 1,000-year reign and the Feast of Tabernacles will continue to be observed. (Zech. 14:16-19). As Christ “tabernacled” among us (Jn. 1:14), now we anticipate the New Creation, where God will dwell with His redeemed forever (Rev. 21:3).

We are reminded that our life here on earth is only temporary, like the booths of this feast. (James 4:14). Our bodies, too, are only temporary and will be changed into a glorified body at Christ’s return. (I Pet. 1:24; I Cor. 15:54). It also reminds us that our trials here are only for a short time because eternity with God awaits us in heaven. (II Cor. 4:17-18).

Conclusion:

These feasts teach us that God’s redemptive plan has always been centered on Christ. How detail-oriented God’s Word is! Each feast in Leviticus 23 finds its fulfillment in Christ:

1. **Passover** → Christ, our Passover Lamb, was sacrificed for us.
2. **Unleavened Bread** → Christ's sinless life and our call to holiness.
3. **Firstfruits** → Christ's resurrection as the firstfruits of the new creation.
4. **Pentecost** → The outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the harvest of souls.
5. **Trumpets** → The future gathering of God's people at Christ's return.
6. **Atonement** → Christ's work of reconciliation through His blood.
7. **Tabernacles** → The ultimate fulfillment in God dwelling with His people eternally.

God has called us to repent and become one with Him as we worship. He wants us to live in joyful anticipation of His return and our eternity in heaven—something only believers can do. Unbelievers who refuse to place their trust in Him can only look forward to judgment in the Lake of Fire for eternity. Don't let that be you!

“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:13-14).



Getting Organized (Numbers Part 1)

Unless you are an accountant, an entire book about counting people doesn't sound all that exciting. However, I think you will be surprised. Once you get past the censuses (which we'll buzz through as quickly as possible) in the first few chapters and the last few chapters, the stuff in the middle is pretty great. And remember, every word of the Bible matters. (II Tim. 3:16-17). So even in books that don't seem to apply to us, we are reading words breathed out by God and they are profitable to our spiritual growth.

- 1)** Read Numbers 1-10:10. The first two chapters are indeed a book of numbers. On your Arrangement of Tabernacle and Israel page that we began in Exodus:
 - inside the blue boxes, list one name of each of the 3 sons of Levi in their proper position around the tabernacle and their total males from a month old and older. (Numb. 3)
 - Inside the red, purple, green, and orange boxes, list the name of the tribe that lived in that area around the tabernacle and the number of males in the tribe able to go to war (Numb. 1-2)
 - In the area "Under the standard of" list the tribe in charge of each group and the total number of men they were responsible for (usually found in the last verse before it changed to the next set)
 - Why weren't the Levites numbered in these camps?

- 2)** Highlight the key verse of Numbers 23:19 in the same color you have each of the other key verses. Memorize it, if possible. How can remembering this verse help us when we doubt God's promises?

- 3)** What was each of the 3 clans of Levi responsible for? (Numb. 3-4). List them on the sheet with the Levites' genealogy.

- 4)** What were the requirements of a Nazarite's vow? (Numb. 6)

- 5)** Why were the Levites chosen to serve in the Tabernacle? (Numb. 1:49; 2:33; 3:12-13; 8:13-19)

Conclusion:

Like Leviticus, God structured Numbers around obedience to Himself. Many verses in Leviticus begin with, "The LORD said to Moses," and this is again predominant in Numbers. At the end of each of the first four chapters, we see the obedience of the Israelites, "The children of Israel did according to all that the Lord commanded Moses."

Someone once said that you could take the entire Bible and break it down into two words: trust and obey. In our culture, we seem to live in a lifestyle of instant gratification and only doing what makes you feel good. God's Word and its commands are considered optional. But there are some things in life that are not optional and one of those things is obedience to God. This is the first step in our "cycle of faith."

God gave Israel a lot of specific things to do and for the first part of Numbers, they seem to be doing pretty well at obeying what He tells them to do. But their journey is just beginning. Will this obedience continue? If you are married, do you remember how exciting that first few months of wedded bliss when all you wanted to do was please your husband with the best meals, the most loving words, a clean house, waiting on him hand and foot (well maybe not that!), but then things began to be humdrum. Or maybe, it just began to feel ordinary. And then you didn't want to give in to him all the time...

That's what Israel must have felt like as they began to run into hardships. As long as things were moving along or it wasn't anything they disagreed with, they were obedient. But then... whining, bickering, and other things began to creep in to their lives. They got tired of walking and that person looked at them funny or they wanted to go an easier way than what God was leading them... and then disobedience crept in.

Where are you in your walk of faith? Have you started it or are you not sure what it really is all about? Feel free to reach out and we'll talk. But, if you have just recently started it, don't take it for granted! When things get tough, don't stop and give up. Learning about God is exciting! Each day can feel like falling in love again! God has exciting things for us if we will just trust and obey Him even when things begin to get difficult. Try Him and see!

"Take heed, brethren [and sisters], lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end" (Heb. 3:12-14).