

# The Feasts Of Israel

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**Text:** Lev. 23:1-44

### Introduction:

- I. The purpose of this chapter is to list the appointed times throughout the year when Israel would come together in a holy convocation.
- II. *The Lord spoke again to Moses, saying, “Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, ‘The Lord’s appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations—My appointed times are these: (Lev. 23:1-2)*
  - A. This introductory superscription reveals that this teaching is not only for the priests who serve in the tabernacle, but also for the whole nation in order to instruct them as to how they should worship the Lord. It introduces two key concepts mentioned frequently throughout the chapter.
    1. They are the Lord’s “appointed times.”
      - a. The Hebrew noun מועד (*mo’ed*) here translated “appointed times” (In the Hebrew text, it is the plural construct form.) is apparently derived from the verb יעד (*ya’ad*) meaning he set or designated, i.e. a time or place. (Levine, 375)
      - b. The term occurs at least 200 times in the OT with a variety of meanings:
        - 1) A place of meeting;
        - 2) An assembly;
        - 3) An agreed upon or appointed time;
        - 4) A festival or time of festivity;
        - 5) And in connection with the Hebrew word for tent, an assembly or meeting, as in the “tent of meeting.” (Koehler and Baumgartner, Vol. 2, 557-558).
      - c. This chapter focuses on those appointed times which the Lord has designated for the Israelites to honor Him through special activities. They are in the Lord’s words, “my appointed times,” that is, times designated either by Him or for Him. (The morning and evening sacrifices are also described with this term in Num. 28:2).
    2. They are appointed times for a “holy convocation.”
      - a. These appointed times Israel is to proclaim as מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ (*miqra’e qodesh*). The noun מִקְרָאֵי (*miqra’e*) which is related to the Hebrew verb קרא (*qara’*) meaning “he called,” could refer to a “summons” (cf. Num. 10:2) or the result of a summons, “an assembly.”
      - b. The adjective describing the assembly is the Hebrew adjective for “holy.”
      - c. Thus they are a “sacred day of celebration” (Noordtzij, 227), “a sacred assembly, convocation” (NIV, NEB), “a sacred occasion” (NJPS), “the sacred assemblies” (JB), and “holy convention” (Wenham, 301, quoted by Hartley, 375).
    3. These appointments serve as occasions for the holy assembling of the Lord’s people to worship Him. What the Lord has sanctified, God’s people must also make holy by honoring His appointments and engaging in the activities He has commanded. The

worship consisted of the sacrifices offered by the priests along with the worship of the congregation which would include prayers, sacrifices, and sacred meals before the Lord.

4. Be aware that liberal critical schools of thought treat the Pentateuch as a work that evolved over many centuries, the late combination of various documentary sources identified as J, E, D, and P (Yahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist, and Priestly Sources). Consequently they maintain that the Israelites borrowed these feasts from their pagan neighbors and gave them new significance in their communities. If you are interested in these evolutionary theories of origins, Hartley treats them in his commentary (Hartley, 378ff).
  - a. I reject this point of view in its denial of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, the essential unity of the Pentateuch, and the historicity of the accounts found in them.
    - 1) Several OT passages acknowledge a body of law attributed to Moses (Josh. 1:7-8) as well as a “Book of Moses” (2 Chron. 25:4; Ez. 6:18; Neh. 13:1).
    - 2) Likewise Jesus and the apostles connected the Torah with Moses (Mat. 19:7; 22:24; Mk. 7:10; 12:26; Jn. 1:17; 5:46; 7:23) (Longman & Dillard, 41)
  - b. I proceed then with the conviction that these feasts were indeed commanded by God and revealed by Moses to the ancient Israelites after their arrival at Mount Sinai as the book of Leviticus reports.
- B. It may be that the Lord, before revealing the specific festivals of this chapter which would be observed annually, intends to remind the Israelites of a weekly appointed time He has also commanded, since it too could be called an appointed time for a holy convocation.

## Body:

### I. The Weekly Sabbath (See Lecture by Tim Smelser)

- A. *‘For six days work may be done; but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the Lord in all your dwellings. (Lev. 23:3)*
  1. The weekly Sabbath was analogous to the creation week of Genesis 1-2. Just as God was engaged in six days of creative work and then rested from all His labors, so the Israelites were commanded to labor six days and observe the seventh day as a day of rest (Ex. 20:11).
  2. More specially the purpose of the Sabbath was to remember the harsh labor that Israel had experienced as slaves in Egypt and the deliverance God provided for them (Deut. 5:15).
- B. With the statement of the holy requirement of the weekly Sabbath, the Lord begins to reveal the annual appointed times: *These are the appointed times of the Lord, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at the times appointed for them. (Lev. 23:4)*

### II. The Lord’s Passover

- A. *‘In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the Lord’s Passover. (Lev. 23:5)*
  1. Other relevant descriptive texts on the Passover are: Ex. 12:1-13, 21-28; Num. 9:1-14; 28:16ff; Deut. 16:1-7.

2. The Hebrew name for this feast is פסח (Pesach).
  - a. Traditionally the feast-name Pesach has been thought to be derived from the verb *pasach* with the meaning of “He passed over” or “He passed by” (Kiel, 522). In the context of the commandment of the Passover observance, this verb is used to describe the Lord’s deliverance: *And the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. (Ex. 12:13, NASB).*
  - b. However Levine has offered an alternative meaning that is reflected in the NJPS translation. That meaning is to *straddle, hedge, or protect*.
    - 1) Note its use in Elijah’s challenge to Israel: *And Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you hesitate (Heb. pasach) between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” (1 Kg. 18:21)*
    - 2) Consequently, in the Passover narrative, the underlying idea of *pasach* could be protection; and the *Pesach* would be then the “protective offering.” Thus the NJPS translates Ex. 12: 23, “*For when the LORD goes through to smite the Egyptians, He will see the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, and the LORD will protect the door and not let the Destroyer enter and smite your home.*” (Levine, 156).
    - 3) The parallelism of the Hebrew poetry in Isaiah 31:5 is also interesting in this connection: *Like flying birds so the Lord of hosts will protect Jerusalem. He will protect and deliver it; He will pass over (Heb. pasach) and rescue it.* The phrase “He will protect” in the first clause is paralleled in the Hebrew poetry with “He will pass over” in the second.
3. The Aramaic term for Passover is *Pascha* and transliterates into the term found in the Greek NT for the Passover and our English adjective “paschal.”
4. The Passover was the first of the three pilgrim festivals which also include the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) and the Feast of Booths (Exodus 23:14; 34:18-23; Leviticus 23:4-22; Deuteronomy 16:16). They provided a basis for national unity and fellowship in their annual observance. They were later called the *Shalosh Regalim* (lit. three feet) because most people went up to Jerusalem on foot. (Eisenburg, 315)

#### B. Details of the observance:

1. The Passover lamb was slain “between the evenings.”
  - a. The exact meaning of this expression is uncertain.
  - b. Some possibilities include:
    - 1) The period of time between the setting of the sun and full darkness;
    - 2) The period of time between the declination of the sun at noon to sundown (Mekilta Bo 5);
    - 3) The period after 3:00 in the afternoon (Jewish tractate *Pesachim* 5.1) (Hartley, 384).
2. Some of the noteworthy features of the Passover sacrifice include:
  - a. A perfect specimen (a male from the sheep or goats, a year old).

- 1) *Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. (Ex. 12:5)*
  - 2) Only such a gift would be worthy of a great king like the Lord (cf. Mal. 1:6-14).
  - 3) The lamb was selected for the Passover on the 10th of the month (Ex. 12:3). This would suggest the need for deliberation in its selection and for care in its preservation until the time of sacrifice.
- b. Prepared by fire
- 1) *Do not eat any of it raw or boiled at all with water, but rather roasted with fire, both its head and its legs along with its entrails. (Ex. 12:9)*
  - 2) Presumably the method of preparation would involve the attachment of the lamb (kid) to a spit or stake that was rotated over a fire. Kiel thinks this was commanded to preserve the wholeness of the lamb (520).
- c. One offering per family (not typically divided)
- 1) *On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers' households, a lamb for each household. (Ex. 12:3)*
  - 2) *It is to be eaten in a single house; you are not to bring forth any of the flesh outside of the house, nor are you to break any bone of it. (Exodus 12:46)*
  - 3) However, provision was made to divide the lamb in the case where a family was too small to eat the whole lamb (Ex. 12:4).
- d. Offered & eaten only once
- 1) *And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire. (Ex. 12:10)*
- e. Offered to save Israel from death
- 1) *And the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. (Ex. 12:13)*
- f. Must stay in the house covered by the blood;
- 1) *And you shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and the two doorposts; and none of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning. (Ex. 12:22)*
- g. Only the circumcised can have access to the sacrifice
- 1) *All the congregation of Israel are to celebrate this. But if a stranger sojourns with you, and celebrates the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near to celebrate it; and he shall be like a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it. The same law shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you." (Ex. 12:47-49)*

3. The Passover meal was eaten in conjunction with the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread so that the bread eaten during the Passover was to be unleavened. It was accompanied by bitter herbs (Ex. 12:15-20).
  - a. In the modern Jewish practice, the Seder plate consists of a lamb shank, bitter herbs (usually horseradish), an egg (representing the rebirth of Israel), charoset (a mixture of apples, nuts, and wine representing the mortar of the bricks made by the enslaved Israelites), and parsley or celery (symbolizing spring or new hope). (Eisenburg, *JPS Dictionary*, 142).
4. Provisions were made for those who were ceremonially unclean to observe the Passover on the 15th of the following month (Num. 9:9-12)
5. There were some alterations in the observance in the Promised Land from its first observance in Egypt due to the change in Israel's circumstances (Thus in the literature a distinction is made between the so-called "Egyptian Passover" vs. the "Permanent Passover").
  - a. During the first Passover the Israelites observed the meal in their houses. After the conquest they would make the pilgrimage to the place where God caused his name to dwell, i.e. the location of the tabernacle or temple (Deut. 16:2).
  - b. Some other differences included no need to sprinkle the door lintel and posts, the first day a Sabbath vs. a day to journey in Egypt, officiating priests vs. head of household, a relaxed atmosphere vs eaten with haste, etc.) (For a further discussion of these and other differences see Edersheim's "The Temple," p. 140ff).
6. Many traditions as to how the Passover was to be observed developed by NT times through the influence of the rabbis. The liturgy included the pouring out of various cups of wine, the singing of certain psalms, and the recounting of events in Israel's history. (For a thorough discussion of this you may want to read Edersheim, p. 145ff).

### C. Significance for Israel:

1. The deliverance attending the Passover marked the beginning of Israel's life as a free people. It was appropriate then that the Passover feast would mark the "first month of the year." (Ex. 12:1).
  - a. That month was called *Abib* (Ex.23:15; 34:18) and is derived from the word for the "ears" of barley that are being harvested about this time (Cf. Ex. 9:31).
  - b. This month was later called *Nisan*.
2. The Lord instituted the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread while His people were still in Egypt (Ex. 12:1ff). The blood of the first Passover lamb identified those who trusted in Him for deliverance and who consequently escaped the tenth plague in Egypt, namely, the death of the firstborn of people and animals (12:12-13). It was observed throughout Israel's generations as a memorial of this great deliverance (Ex. 12:14).
3. It served as a great teaching moment for Israel's children as the fathers instructed the children during the meal about God's redemption of Israel from slavery (Ex. 12:26-27).
4. The observance of the Passover is mentioned specifically in connection with the wilderness wanderings (Num. 9:1-14), the entrance into Canaan (Josh. 5:10-12), the reigns of Solomon (1 Kg. 9:25; 2 Chron. 8:13), Hezekiah (2 Chron. 30:1-27), Josiah

(2 Kg. 23:21-23; 2 Chron. 35:1-19), and in the days of the return from exile by Ezra (Ez. 6:19). It is also included in Ezekiel's future temple description (Eze. 45:21ff).

#### D. Significance in the NT:

1. Because Jesus was a faithful Israelite, He and His disciples observed the Feast of Passover at the appointed times (Lk. 2:41; Jn. 2:13; Lk. 22:15)
2. The Passover finds its fulfillment in Jesus and His kingdom.
  - a. *And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." (Luke 22:15-16)*
  - b. Jesus affirmed that He was the fulfillment of the totality of the OT Scriptures (Mt. 5:17-18; Lk. 24:44ff).
    - 1) He fulfilled the specific Messianic prophecies of a coming king.
    - 2) Moreover He and His kingdom is the reality (body) of which the Law's ordinances are but a type (shadow). (See Col. 2:16ff; cf. also Heb. 10:1 where the Hebrew writer uses the similar concepts of "shadow" and "form").
3. The Jewish Passover points to Jesus in many ways.
  - a. A "Lamb" slain
    - 1) *The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (Jn. 1:29)*
    - 2) *Christ, our Passover has been sacrificed for us. (1 Cor. 5:7).*
    - 3) Jesus as God's Passover was slain during Passover week (Matt. 26:2; Mark 14:1, 2; John 18:28).
    - 4) Some affirm that Jesus was crucified on the actual day that the Passover lambs were being slain. However reconciling the gospel accounts of the Passover week is very difficult; and there are many proposed solutions.
  - b. A perfect specimen
    - 1) *For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. (Heb. 4:15)*
    - 2) It is no wonder that God should expect a sacrifice to be perfect; for He intended it to be a picture of His sinless Son.
  - c. Prepared by "fire"
    - 1) Is it possible that God required that the Lamb be roasted in flames to typify the sufferings of the Christ?
    - 2) *For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. (Heb. 2:10)*
    - 3) *Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, (Heb. 5:8-9)*

- d. One offering for the whole family; thus not a bone broken
  - 1) There may have been significance to the fact that the whole lamb was shared by one family in one house. By Jesus' one offering he has purchased the whole family of God (1 Pet. 1:19).
  - 2) *Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Ac. 20:28)*
  - 3) John sees the typological significance of Jesus as God's Passover when the soldiers did not break His legs: *For these things came to pass, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, "Not a bone of Him shall be broken. (Jn. 19:36)*
- e. Offered once for all
  - 1) Like the Passover lamb, Jesus' sacrifice is sufficient for God's people for all time. It does not have to be repeated.
  - 2) *For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. (Heb. 10:14)*
- f. To save us from spiritual death
  - 1) *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. (Rom. 5:8-9)*
  - 2) Like the Passover, the blood of Jesus provides atonement or covering to save us from death.
- g. Must stay in the house covered by blood
  - 1) Just as those protected by the blood had to stay in the house, so those who are redeemed by Jesus' blood must remain a part of His body.
  - 2) *For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. (Eph. 5:23)*
- 4. What is prophetic may also be said to be provisional. Because Jesus fulfills the Passover, His disciples have been released from the requirements of the Law to observe it as a matter of salvation (Rom. 7:1-6; Col. 2:16-17).
  - a. However, the Passover continued to have meaning for Jewish disciples as a part of their Jewish heritage; and they continued to observe it in memory of that great deliverance (cf. Ac. 21:20-24).
  - b. However Gentiles were exempt from any requirement to keep the ordinances of the Law either as a matter of salvation or as a matter of religious heritage (Gal. 5:2-5; Ac. 21:25).

### III. The Feast of Unleavened Bread

- A. *'Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work. But for seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the Lord. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; (Lev. 23:6-8)*

1. Other relevant descriptive texts on the Feast of Unleavened Bread are Ex. 12:15-20; 13:3-10; 23:14-15; 34:18; Num. 28:17-25; Deut. 16:1-8
2. Like the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread was instituted in Egypt in connection with the Passover. It would recall the haste with which the Israelites left Egypt after the death of the firstborn of Egypt. God gave these requirements for the Feast of Unleavened Bread while instituting the Passover.
3. Though the Passover was observed with unleavened bread, this feast would only be observed after the exodus. There is then in the institution of this feast a wonderful assurance. God's people were being assured that, not only would they be delivered, but that provisions were already being made for their future worship to God in memory of His deliverance.
4. The feast is called in Hebrew מצות (Mazzot) which is the name of the unleavened loaves or wafers eaten during this feast.
5. The Hebrew word for feast is חג, (*chag*) and occurs often in connection with these holy times.
  - a. Both Keil and Edersheim think the word is derived from the Hebrew word for dance, חגג (*chagag*). It is also related to the Hebrew word *chug*, a circle or roundness; and thus it calls attention to the joyous or celebratory nature of the feast.
  - b. Another approach however would be to think of a pilgrimage (a round-trip journey to and from the place of God's dwelling). It is cognate with the Arabic word for a pilgrimage, *hajutun*. Thus Levine defines it as a "pilgrimage feast." (156).

#### B. Details of the observance:

1. All leaven was to be removed from the house.
  - a. ... *on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses (Ex. 12:15)*
  - b. The Hebrew *chamets* is leavened dough. Today we can buy packaged yeast for making leavened bread; but in Biblical times leavened bread was made from the insertion of leavened dough into a new lump of dough and allowing it to permeate throughout (cf. 1 Cor. 5:6).
2. Only unleavened bread was to be eaten during this seven-day period.
  - a. *You shall not eat anything leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread. (Ex. 12:20)*
3. On the first and seventh days the Israelites would gather in a holy convocation at the tabernacle (temple), in a "solemn assembly" (Deut. 16:8). On these days, the worshippers would do no "servile work."
  - a. Throughout the section the NASB translates "you shall not do any laborious work." (Heb. *meleket 'avodah*) This prohibition is typical of either the first and/or the last day of the feasts that Israel observed.
    - 1) This prohibition is different from the requirements of the weekly Sabbath which forbade all work, even kindling of a fire in preparing food.
    - 2) In other words, the participants were not as restricted as on the weekly Sabbath. In this case, they could prepare food and pursue the activities

involved in the feast, but could not engage in their usual occupations. On the intervening days between the first and seventh day celebrations, the people would be allowed to carry out their usual occupations.

- b. Levine contrasts the rest of the Sabbath and the rest of the festivals in this way: “On seasonal festivals, one refrains from work primarily to be free to celebrate, whereas on the Sabbath, the very object is rest.” (Commentary on Lev. 23:3).
  - 1) He later adds: “Hebrew *shabbaton* expresses that which is like the Sabbath and as such designates the Day of Atonement and other occasions, including the first and seventh days of festivals.” (Levine, 155).
- c. Eisenberg agrees: “Whatever the interpretation of the term, all agree that the preparation of food—including such labors as slaughtering, cooking, and baking—is permitted on festivals (other than Yom Kippur) that fall on a weekday, based on the verse, ‘only what every person is to eat, that alone may be prepared for you’ (Exod. 12:16).” (Eisenberg, R. L, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions*, 157).
4. “An offering by fire” translates a single Hebrew noun, אִשֶּׁה (*‘isheh*). It is derived from the Hebrew word for fire, i.e. it is a “firing” (Keil) or “an offering made by fire.” (Kiel on Lev. 1:9; See also Koehler and Baumgartner, Vol. 1, p. 93)
  - a. The priests would be responsible for offering certain sacrifices for atonement during this period.
  - b. In addition, each day the priests would offer in behalf of the whole nation as burnt offerings two bulls, one ram, seven lambs each of which would also include an accompanying grain offering. In addition a sin offering of one goat was to be made each day. (Num. 28:17-25)
5. Moreover, everyone was required to bring something to honor the Lord during this festival (cf. Ex. 23:15; Deut. 16:16-17)
  - a. Keil notes that these were gifts to God as Israel’s king from the blessing He had given them. They were at the same time a source of blessing to the giver as they indicated the fellowship the worshipper had with God in sharing a meal in His presence.” (147)
  - b. The gifts themselves were to be given “according to the blessing of the Lord” which they had received from Him. Compare the NT regulation of giving “as he has been prospered.” (1 Cor. 16:1)
6. The punishment for violation of these requirements was banishment from Israel (Ex. 12:15).

### C. Significance in ancient Israel:

1. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was the celebration of a pilgrimage feast throughout Israel’s generations in which they would remember God’s deliverance (Ex. 12:14).
  - a. *You shall not eat leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat with it unleavened bread, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), in order that you may remember all the days of your life the day when you came out of the land of Egypt. (Deut. 16:3)*
  - b. The unleavened bread would call to mind not only the anxiety attending the hurried departure (Ex. 12:11; 33-34), but also the harsh conditions of slavery

from which God's people had been delivered; thus the unleavened bread was called "the bread of affliction."

2. This feast also served as a teaching occasion to the children.
  - a. *"And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.' And it shall serve as a sign to you on your hand, and as a reminder on your forehead, that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth; for with a powerful hand the Lord brought you out of Egypt. Therefore, you shall keep this ordinance at its appointed time from year to year. (Ex. 13:8-10)*
  - b. Verses like this are the origin of the Pharisaic practice of wearing phylacteries on their heads and hands (cf. Mt. 23:5).
3. Keil suggests that just as bread could be a symbol of life, so unleavened bread would symbolize the new life of God's people as they set aside the corrupting influence of life in Egypt and began a new pure life in fellowship with God alone (*Exodus*, 21). In view of Paul's acknowledgement of the spiritual dimensions of Israel's post-exodus life (sharing in one spiritual food and drink, 1 Cor. 10:1ff), it is possible that there is some spiritual symbolism pointing beyond the mere haste of the deliverance.
4. Isaiah's prophecy of 52:11-12 seems to rely upon the Feast of Unleavened Bread to provide the vocabulary of God's promise of what He would provide for Israel in the Messianic age.
  - a. *"Depart, depart, go out from there, touch nothing unclean; Go out of the midst of her, purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of the LORD. But you will not go out in haste, nor will you go as fugitives; for the LORD will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard." (Isaiah 52:11-12)*
  - b. This text, which Paul also alludes to in 2 Cor. 6:17, suggests the calm assurance that God's people have in knowing that they will journey toward Mt. Zion with the protection of God both in front of them and behind them. They need not then go out "in haste" as did the Israelites from Egypt nor feel like fugitives to be hunted down.
  - c. A Messianic interpretation of Isaiah 52 would suggest the complete peace of God's people in the protective power of the God who surrounds them (cf. 1 Pet. 1:3-5).

#### D. Significance in the NT:

1. Because Jesus was a faithful Jew, He and His disciples observed this feast (Lk. 22:7ff), though Christians have been released from these requirements of the Law through the death of Christ (Col. 2:16-17). (See earlier note on the Passover).
2. Just as the Passover is used to describe Jesus as God's lamb, so the Feast of Unleavened Bread is used to describe the holy life of the church.
  - a. *Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Cor. 5:7-8)*
  - b. The Feast of Unleavened Bread by analogy could describe the holy life that the sacrifice of Jesus as our Passover demands.

- 1) Throughout the NT “leaven” is portrayed as a corrupting influence and a symbol of sin. Therefore to “keep the feast,” God’s people must remove sins like malice and wickedness. Sincerity and truth must take their place. And those who persist in sin must be removed from the midst of God’s people.
- c. Just as Israel observed the feast for seven days, so the church observes this feast seven days a week or all the time.
- d. During this time we also, like the Israelites, return to the Lord what we are able to give according to the blessing He has given us. Our sacrifices are a manifestation of our gratitude to Him and an acknowledgement of the fellowship we have with Him as a holy priesthood serving in His spiritual tabernacle (Cf. Heb. 13:15-16).

#### IV. Waving of the ‘Omer (Prelude to the Feast of Weeks or Harvest)

A. *Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, ‘When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord for you to be accepted; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it. Now on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb one year old without defect for a burnt offering to the Lord. Its grain offering shall then be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering by fire to the Lord for a soothing aroma, with its libation, a fourth of a hin of wine. Until this same day, until you have brought in the offering of your God, you shall eat neither bread nor roasted grain nor new growth. It is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places. (Lev. 23:9-14)*

1. Though it would not be considered a separate feast, it might be helpful to give special treatment to the presentation of the ‘omer as a prelude to the Feast of Weeks.
2. During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, God required that the Israelites acknowledge His provision of the barley harvest and present the first fruits of that harvest to Him.

#### B. Details of the observance:

1. The harvest under consideration would be the beginning of the barley harvest which takes place near the time of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
2. The first עֹמֶר (‘omer) or sheaf of the field was brought to the tabernacle/temple.
  - a. Most versions translate this as a “sheaf” or bundle of grain from the fields.
  - b. Hartley suggests that in Jewish tradition this ‘omer was not a sheaf of grain; but rather a barley cake (385).
3. The ‘omer is waved or elevated (from Heb. *haniph*).
  - a. The waving has been described as pointing to all four points of the compass. (This idea is suggested by modern rabbis.)
  - b. Levine cites a Mishnaic tractate that describes the action as going to and fro and lifting the ‘omer up and down.
  - c. Harrison notes that, in a sense, the priest makes the sign of the cross. (I’m not so sure about that, since the exact action of the waving is uncertain.)
  - d. The purpose of the waving is to present it to the Lord that it might be accepted by Him.
4. After the omer is waved, it is given to the priests for their support.

5. An unblemished lamb is offered as an  $\text{עֹלָה}$  (*olah*), a whole burnt offering, along with two *ephahs* of a grain offering (seven quarts, double the usual amount) and a libation of a fourth of a *hin* of wine (2 1/2 pints).
  - a. Paul appears to allude to this practice when he says to the Philippians, "...even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all." (Phil. 2:17)
6. God warns that the Israelites should eat no bread (*etsem*, lit. "bone") until they have first honored him by the presentation of the *omer*.

### C. Significance for Israel:

1. In Israel's agricultural calendar, the grain fields began to ripen as the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were being observed. As the grain was cut, it would be bundled into sheaves for storage.
2. The first of these sheaves (or a barley cake) would be brought to the tabernacle (temple) and given to the priest who would wave it as if it were being given to God. This symbolic act acknowledged that the Lord was the provider for the nation.
3. And thus while Israel was gratefully remembering God's past deliverance in the Exodus, they were simultaneously expressing their gratitude for His present provisions in the land He had given them.
4. As a modern rabbi has stated it: "The bringing of the Omer provides us with a remembrance that we believe in Hashem. We acknowledge that Hashem is the one who wants us to live, and therefore provides us with sustenance in every year, so that we can serve Him and keep the Torah." (Rabbi Yehudah Prero at [www.torah.org](http://www.torah.org))
  - a. *Note:* Hashem, which means "the Name" in Hebrew is often used by modern Jews as a substitute for the divine name.
5. God's people were being taught to acknowledge Him first in all things. In ancient Israel, God didn't accept leftovers. Instead His people could not eat of anything until His blessing was first acknowledged by giving Him the first fruits of the harvest.
6. Modern Jews no longer observe this requirement due to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple.

### D. Significance in NT:

1. The imagery of first fruits is taken up in many NT texts with varying points of emphasis but all conveying the natural idea of the first of a spiritual harvest. It may also have a qualitative denotation (i.e. the best). (See BDAG discussion of *aparche*)
  - a. Paul in Rom. 8:23 acknowledges that the Christian possesses "the first fruits of the Spirit," that is the blessings of His present work in anticipation of the future work of giving life to our mortal bodies (Rom. 8:23) in the resurrection, the redemption of our bodies.
  - b. Paul in Rom. 11 discusses the challenging condition of the Jewish rejection of their Messiah and expresses the hope that the partial hardening of Israel may give way to a more widespread acceptance of the gospel among Jews. He remarks, "And if the first piece of dough (*Gr. aparche*) be holy, the lump is also; (Rom. 11:16)
  - c. In 1 Cor. 15:20, Christ is "the first fruits of them that are asleep."

- d. Surely, the acknowledgment of God's provision has continuity in the NT in the Christian's prayers of thanksgiving that He is the source "of every good and perfect gift" (Jas. 1:17).
  - e. Interestingly, James in the same context capitalizes upon the analogy of first fruits to affirm that God is not only the source of every blessing we have; but Christians are, as it were, the "first fruits" of His field.
2. The language of first fruits is used in the NT inasmuch as the work of saving souls is analogous to a harvest. (Cf. our song "Bringing in the sheaves") Consequently in Rom. 16:5 Epaphroditus bears the distinction of being "the first convert to Christ from Asia" ("first convert" translates the Greek *aparche*.)
  3. In Rev. 14:4 the 144,000 are said to have "been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb."
  4. The Jewish offerings of first fruits suggest a principle of importance to all believers, viz. the need to honor God with the first of all that he has given us.
    - a. As Christians we must "make friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness so that when it fails they may receive us into everlasting habitations" (Lk. 16:9).
    - b. Seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness has priority over all material concerns (Mt. 6:33).

## V. The Feast of Weeks

A. *You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the sabbath, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete sabbaths. You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh sabbath; then you shall present a new grain offering to the Lord. You shall bring in from your dwelling places two loaves of bread for a wave offering, made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of a fine flour, baked with leaven as first fruits to the Lord. Along with the bread, you shall present seven one year old male lambs without defect, and a bull of the herd, and two rams; they are to be a burnt offering to the Lord, with their grain offering and their libations, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the Lord. You shall also offer one male goat for a sin offering and two male lambs one year old for a sacrifice of peace offerings. The priest shall then wave them with the bread of the first fruits for a wave offering with two lambs before the Lord; they are to be holy to the Lord for the priest. On this same day you shall make a proclamation as well; you are to have a holy convocation. You shall do no laborious work. It is to be a perpetual statute in all your dwelling places throughout your generations. When you reap the harvest of your land, moreover, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor gather the gleanings of your harvest; you are to leave them for the needy and the alien. I am the Lord your God."* (Lev. 23:15-22)

1. The Jews call this feast חַג שָׁבֻעֹת (Chag Shavuot, i.e. Feast of Weeks) or קָצִיר (Qatsir, i.e. harvest) based on Ex. 23:16 or בְּכֹרֵי קָצִיר הַטִּיבִים (*bicure qatsir chitim*, i.e. first fruits of the wheat harvest, Exod 34:22; cf. Num 28:26).
2. Late in the post-exilic era, it received the name *Pentecoste* (2 Macc 12:31-32 and Tob 2:1) (Hartley, 377). Our English word is a transliteration of the Greek term, deriving its names from the 50 day period after the Passover.

### B. Details of the Observance:

1. The time of the observance of the Feast of Weeks is calculated from the day that the *'omer* or first sheaf of barley was waved before the Lord during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (See previous section).
2. There was some ambiguity on when the counting of the 50 days began, since it is identified as "the day after the Sabbath." Hartley enumerates four different positions:
  - a. The feast is calculated from the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread which was a festal Sabbath.
  - b. The feast is calculated from the day after the regularly weekly Sabbath that occurs during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
  - c. The feast is calculated from the festal Sabbath that ends the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
  - d. The feast is calculated from the first weekly Sabbath after the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
  - e. The first position is the most likely for these reasons:
    - 1) Joshua 5:10-12 indicates that the Israelites ate produce from the land of Canaan the day after the observance of the Passover. This would appear to indicate that the *'omer* would have been waved on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (a festal sabbath) and that it was acceptable then to eat the produce of the land in keeping with the law of Leviticus 23.
    - 2) This view is supported by the LXX, by various Jewish Targums, and by Jewish writers such as Philo and Josephus (Hartley, 386).
    - 3) Keil also points out that calculating from the weekly Sabbath would have the effect of moving the Feast of Weeks to different times based on when the weekly Sabbath occurred during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It would be more likely that the Feast would occur at a fixed time in the year as with the other appointed times (*Leviticus*, 999).
3. A new grain offering of two leavened loaves made from two tenths of an ephah of fine flour was made. These were to be waved as first fruits to the Lord. They along with two lambs were reserved for the priest.
4. As in the case of the other feasts, the priests would offer special sacrifices in addition to the daily morning and evening sacrifices. They included seven year-old male lambs without defect, a bull of the herd, and two rams.
  - a. These would be offered as a burnt offering to the Lord, with their grain offering and their libations. One goat was also to be offered as a sin offering, while two lambs were waved and presented along with the leavened loaves to the priests to be eaten as a peace offering.
5. See previous notes on "laborious work" and "holy convocation."
6. Deuteronomy 16:9-12 gives further details on the pilgrim's observance. Each one would come with freewill offerings to be given to the Lord and a festive family meal was celebrated which was shared with the Levites and with the needy.
7. The practice was to be a "perpetual statute" (Heb. *chuq*).
8. Obedience to God's command is vouchsafed by the declaration, "I am the Lord your God."

- a. The expression “the Lord” translates the Hebrew Tetragrammaton by which God is commonly designated in Scripture, transliterated in English *YHVH* or the German *YHWH*.
  - b. At one time, some scholars erroneously believed that the Hebrew pointing of the Masoretic text provided a basis for pronouncing the divine name and produced the name “Jehovah,” combining the consonants with the underlying vowel pointing. However, the Masoretic pointing is placed there to prevent pronouncing the divine name and to prompt the reader by means of the vowels to substitute in its place “Adonai,” i.e. “my Lord.” This is because, among ancient Jews, the divine name was considered so sacred that it was not to be pronounced in the reading of Scripture. At those places where the divine name appeared, they would substitute, “Adonai,” a word meaning “my Lord or master.”
  - c. This custom is honored in modern translations by the use of the translation “the Lord” where *YHVH* appears (in some versions in capitals). However, in some contexts this practice creates difficulties, since the divine name is sometimes coupled with the term that is often substituted for it resulting in “the Lord, the Lord.” In those cases the convention is to translate “The Lord God.”
  - d. Now it is not unusual to see the divine name transliterated according to German scholarly tradition as “Yahweh.” (This a German transliteration where “w” in German would have been pronounced with a “v” sound; but where it is commonly now pronounced with a “w” sound as in English pronunciation.)
  - e. So then the declaration, “I am Yahweh,” vouchsafes His people’s obedience with the reminder that it is He their God and Redeemer who commands them. Their obedience is a manifestation of their respect for Him as the one who revealed Himself to Moses as Yahweh and who delivered them from the land of Egypt.
9. It was also appropriate here to insert a regulation concerning the extent of the harvest. The edges of the fields were not to be reaped and the harvested area was not to be gleaned. These were to be left for the poor and the aliens living in the land who could reap the edges of the fields and glean what had fallen upon the ground for their use. (Cf. Ruth’s practice described in Ruth 2)

### C. Significance for Israel:

1. Though this feast lasted only a single day, it was a joyous celebration of all that the Lord had provided for his people. As Hartley notes, it was “grounded in the Lordship of Yahweh, not in the forces of nature.” (380)
  - a. This feast especially acknowledged the provisions that God had made for Israel in the wheat harvest. It was the culminating acknowledgement of God’s provision that began with the presentation of the ‘omer of the first harvest fifty days before.
  - b. This final day could be seen as putting an exclamation mark upon this period of thanksgiving for the grain harvest which was now being completed. The presentation of the ‘omer and the Feast of Weeks would unify the thanksgiving that God’s people should have felt in view of the abundance of God’s provision in the grain harvest.
2. Harrison notes, “The feast reminded the Israelites that God’s care and control reached into every area of life, making no false distinction between material and spiritual blessings.” (*Leviticus*, 218).

3. The repetition of the law governing the provision of the poor through reaping the corners of the fields and gleaning where the fields are harvested is significant in this context (cf. Lev. 19:9-10). God is not only interested in His people acknowledging Him with their produce; He is also interested in their sharing what they have with the needy. Love for God and love for one's fellowman are part and parcel of the believer's spiritual life.
4. There was an ancient tradition that *Shavuot* was the day upon which the Law was revealed. Hartley agrees, writing "late in the Second Temple it became connected with the giving of the covenant at Sinai (*Jub.* 6:1-21; 14:1-20). This association, however, may be hinted at in 2 Chr 15:10-14, which refers to a feast to renew the covenant celebrated in the third month. The date in Exod 19:1 for Israel's gathering at Sinai to receive the law from God supports this connection. In the post-exilic community a covenant renewal ceremony was an important part of this feast (Kraus, *Worship*, 59)." (Hartley, 381).
5. However Keil and Delitzsch flatly deny that such an association existed until the time of Maimonides.

#### D. Significance in the NT:

1. The Day of Pentecost is one of the most significant events of the NT, being the day in which repentance and remission of sins began to be proclaimed to the nations (Lk. 24:47).
2. The question as to whether the Feast of Weeks had typological significance is more difficult. Clearly there are two significant things about Pentecost in the NT:
  - a. It could be called the beginning of a spiritual harvest of souls.
  - b. It was the beginning of the promulgation of the new covenant. (If indeed the first covenant was revealed at the time of the Feast of Weeks, it would be more than a remarkable coincidence that the provisions of the new covenant should likewise be offered at the same time.)
3. Once more we discern in the requirements of First fruits and Weeks that God expected His people to honor Him from the first of all that He had given to them. Should we do any less?
4. And it is also important to recognize that our sharing should not only be given to honor God, but also to assist the needy around us, especially those of the household of the faith (Gal. 6:10). The close association of worshipping God and providing for the needs of one's brethren anticipates and refutes any concept that devoting a gift to God (*korban*) exempted one from the commanded duties to parents or any other worthy recipient (cf. Mk. 7).

#### VI. Sounding of Trumpets

- A. *Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'In the seventh month on the first of the month, you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall not do any laborious work, but you shall present an offering by fire to the Lord.'"* (Lev. 23:23-25)
  1. The Hebrew name is תְּרוּעָה (*Teru'ah* meaning "a blasting" or "joyful noise" (Kiel) of the *shophar*.)

2. The sounding trumpets are a reminder of the importance of this month in Israel's relationship with God, being the month of both the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Booths.

**B. Details of the observance:**

1. This month is named *Tishri* and is also the seventh month (yet another example of the significance of seven as a number of spiritual completeness.)
2. The month was called in with a loud blast of trumpets (Kiel thinks on the basis of Jewish tradition that they were *shopharim* [animal horns], not the silver trumpets mentioned for other tasks in Numbers 10). (*Leviticus*, 1005).
3. It was also a day of rest (but again, not as strict as the weekly Sabbath).
4. The congregation met for worship where they lived. This was not a pilgrim feast requiring an appearance at the tabernacle (temple) and joined together for worship.
5. At the tabernacle (temple) the priests offered on this day one bullock, one ram, and seven he-lambs, with proper meal offerings, together with a he-goat for a sin offering (Num. 29:2-6).

**C. Significance for Israel:**

1. Originally it appears that the blowing of trumpets marked the beginning of the month in which the auspicious celebration of both the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Booths occurred. Note the words of Ps. 81: "*Blow the horn on the New Moon, on the full moon for the day of our pilgrimage festival.*" (Levine, 160).
2. After the exile, this day marked the beginning of the Jewish New Year (the so-called civil New Year). Hence in the modern Jewish calendar it is called "Rosh Hashanah," the beginning of the year.
3. There are no specific references to the blowing of trumpets in the seventh month in the NT. However the concept of sounding trumpets is attached to the arrival of the final day of redemption (1 Thes. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:50-52). However, I am personally inclined to associate the blowing of trumpets in these texts with the celebration of Jubilee rather than the annual soundings of the seventh month.

**VII. Day of Atonement** (See Lecture by Alan Dvorak)

- A. *And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "On exactly the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you, and you shall humble your souls and present an offering by fire to the Lord. Neither shall you do any work on this same day, for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement on your behalf before the Lord your God. If there is any person who will not humble himself on this same day, he shall be cut off from his people. As for any person who does any work on this same day, that person I will destroy from among his people. You shall do no work at all. It is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places. It is to be a sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall humble your souls; on the ninth of the month at evening, from evening until evening you shall keep your sabbath."* (Lev. 23:26-32)

**VIII. Feast of Tabernacles**

- A. *Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'On the fifteenth of this seventh month is the Feast of Booths for seven days to the Lord. 'On the first day is a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work of any kind. 'For seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the Lord. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation*

and present an offering by fire to the Lord; it is an assembly. You shall do no laborious work. ‘These are the appointed times of the Lord which you shall proclaim as holy convocations, to present offerings by fire to the Lord—burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and libations, each day’s matter on its own day—besides those of the sabbaths of the Lord, and besides your gifts, and besides all your votive and freewill offerings, which you give to the Lord. On exactly the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the crops of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the Lord for seven days, with a rest on the first day and a rest on the eighth day. Now on the first day you shall take for yourselves the foliage of beautiful trees, palm branches and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. You shall thus celebrate it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year. It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths, so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.’” (Lev. 23:33-43)

1. Other relevant descriptive texts include Ex. 23:16; 34:22; Deut. 16:13-15; 31:9-13; Num. 29:12-39).
2. The Feast of Booths was a week-long feast that began on “the fifteenth of this seventh month” (*Tishri*, mid-October), five days after the Day of Atonement.
3. The Hebrew name for this feast is סֻכּוֹת (*Sukkot*).
  - a. The word “tabernacles” would not likely evoke today a proper image of the observance, since people commonly associate the word tabernacle with the holy dwelling of God among the Israelites.
    - 1) Our English word tabernacle is derived from the Latin word *tabernaculum* meaning tent.
    - 2) However in this festival the word translated tabernacles is not the Hebrew word for tent (*ohel*), nor the word for the dwelling of God (*mishqan*) which is often translated “tabernacle” in the English Bible.
    - 3) The Hebrew word is a feminine plural form of *sukkah*, a word meaning a booth or hut. It was a temporary shelter made for protection from the weather. (Koehler & Baumgartner)
    - 4) For other uses of *sukkah* see Psa. 31:21; Isa. 4:6; Jonah 4:5.
  - b. This festival is also called חַג הַאֲסִיפָה (*chag ha’asiph*, the Pilgrimage Feast of Ingathering (Ex. 23:16; 34:22) and by shortened expressions such as “Feast to the Lord” (Lev. 23:39).

#### B. Details of the observance:

1. For “holy convocation,” see the introductory note.
2. For “an offering by fire” see previous notes.
3. Again, special offerings were designated to be offered in addition to those routinely offered each day, on the Sabbath, and the voluntary gifts Israel would bring from time to time to the Lord. The series of offerings for this week constituted an extraordinary expense (71 bulls, 15 rams, 105 lambs, and 8 goats).

4. On the first and eighth day, the Israelites ceased from servile work, and burnt offerings were presented to the Lord. See Num. 29:12-33 for details of the numerous offerings made each day.
5. The Lord pauses here to summarize the kinds of offerings that God's people will be making during these special occasions (See Kevin Kay's lecture for a more detailed description of these various types of sacrifice).
6. Harrison suggest that it was attended by a reading of the Law each seventh year. (ISBE, 535)
7. In an additional note about the Feast of Booths, the people were instructed to gather fronds from various beautiful trees (palms, willows, and possibly myrtle) and rejoice before the Lord. Keil thinks that these same branches were used to construct the huts in which they dwelt during this seven-day celebration. This is the only time in this chapter that God's people are explicitly commanded to rejoice, though rejoicing was a part of the worship of other feasts such as the Feast of Weeks (cf. Deut. 16:11).
8. Keil points out that there was an 8th day celebration that closed out the festal year with sacrifices (*Shemini Atsaret*). This "solemn assembly" is derived from the Hebrew '*atsar* meaning to "detain, restrain, confine." (Levine, 162)
9. Two extra-biblical texts also give some detail about the celebrations: Josephus, *Ant.* xiii. 13, 5; 2 Mac.10:6-7

### C. Significance for Israel:

1. The phrase "*when you have gathered in the crops of the land*" indicates that this feast comes at the close of the harvest season, rounding out Israel's celebration of God's provision through harvest of the olive trees, orchards, and vineyards (Deut. 16:13). It was both a time of joyful celebration for the new produce and a time of remembering how Yahweh had guided and cared for his people. (Hartley, 381).
2. Notice also that all the festival times are carefully scheduled at times during the year which would coincide with the completion of major agricultural tasks. The intervening periods would be times needed for planting and tending the fields. God did not intend for these celebrations to work a hardship upon His people; and He carefully scheduled them to have the greatest spiritual impact without being physically oppressive.
3. God's provision in the fall harvest would come shortly before the rainy season which would prepare the soil for the sowing of the grain for the coming year. The remembrance of God's provision in the wilderness would assist the faith of the Israelites as they prayed for God to bless their land once more with rain for the new growing season.
  - a. Note the connection between the worship of God in the Feast of Booths and God's response in providing rain in Zechariah 14:16-19.
  - b. *Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them. And if the family of Egypt does not go up or enter, then no rain will fall on them; it will be the plague with which the LORD smites the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths. This will be the*

*punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths.*

4. Like all the pilgrim feasts, it was to be a joyful celebration: *“Seven days you shall celebrate a feast to the Lord your God in the place which the Lord chooses, because the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you shall be altogether joyful. (Deut. 16:15)*
5. It was a time of remembering the booths in which the Israelites had found shelter *“...so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt.”*
  - a. It is interesting to note in this connection that one of the first stops of Israel after leaving Egypt was Succoth (Ex. 12:37, the very word which means booths). Does it preserve a memory of the Israelites living in booths there?
  - b. It was to place vividly before the eyes of the future generations of Israel a memorial of the grace, care, and protection which God afforded to His people in the great and terrible wilderness (Deut 8:15). (Keil)
  - c. By way of contrast it might also heighten the blessing of their present experience as they *“built goodly houses and dwelt therein; where their herds and flocks, their silver and their gold, and all that they had, multiplied” (Deut 8:9,12-13)*
6. Moses urges this feast to also be a time of covenant renewal in which the Law would be read to the people every seven years (Deut. 31:10-13).
7. The feast would continue to be observed throughout Israel’s history.
  - a. The dedication of Solomon’s temple appears to have taken place during this feast (cf. 1 Kg. 8:2)
  - b. Harrison notes that it was apparently not observed during the monarchy (but cf. 2 Chron. 8:13)
  - c. A special observance in the time of Ezra (Neh. 13:18)
8. Isaiah apparently uses God’s guidance and protection of His people in the wilderness as a foretaste of His future guidance and protection on Mount Zion.
  - a. Could the “canopy” Isaiah envisions be evoked by the memory of the booths in which God’s people found shelter?
  - b. At least the message is clear enough, that God’s future people would enjoy complete divine protection.
9. The prophet Zechariah foresees a time when the people of God will return to Zion to celebrate the Feast of Booths with great joy (Zechariah 14:16ff).
  - a. In light of the complex symbolism of the prophecies of Zechariah, it would be unwise to take these words in the most literal sense. The prophet couches the glory of the future kingdom of God with the language of Israel’s present experience.
  - b. The point seems to be that the eschatological or Messianic kingdom would include people of all nations who would celebrate with the highest joy the provision and protection of God. Those nations that refused would suffer the loss of the blessing of God.

10. “Tabernacles is celebrated in modern Judaism by other rituals and customs including the reciting of *hoshanot* while making circuits in the synagogue, reading the Book of Ecclesiastes, inviting *ushpizin* (symbolic guests; see p. 235) to the sukkah, and the special rituals associated with Hoshana Rabbah, the seventh day of the festival (see p. 237).” (Eisenburg, JPS Dictionary of Jewish Words, 228)

#### D. Significance in the NT:

1. Jesus and His disciples observed this feast (Jn. 7:2).
2. According to the Rabbis, a special ceremony of water libation was celebrated at the end of the first day of Sukkot (but not on the Sabbath) at the Temple in Jerusalem (Suk. 51a-b). (Eisenburg, 228)
  - a. Jesus’ claim at this feast to be the source of living water could have been occasioned by this ritual procession in which water taken from the pool of Siloam was carried and poured out in thanksgiving to God.
  - b. “*Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, “From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.”’ But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*” (John 7:37-39)
  - c. Hodges believes that this ritual was derived from Ezekiel’s temple vision and suggests that believers, by means of the indwelling Spirit, fulfill Ezekiel’s vision of the new temple to come and the water that flows from it. (See the bibliography for the journal article information).

#### IX. Epilogue:

- A. “*So Moses declared to the sons of Israel the appointed times of the Lord.*” (Lev. 23:44)
- B. The holy calendar of events God has revealed in this chapter looks back to God’s past redemption and looks forward to His present provision.
  1. Hartley well summarizes the theology of the festal system: “...these harvest celebrations both praise God the Creator and the Sustainer for the harvest and recount the great saving deed of God in praise of him as their Lord and Guide. These two pictures of God are intertwined in the Scriptures, and they are juxtaposed in the worship of Yahweh. The picture of God the Creator promotes his power, wisdom, and majesty. The picture of God the Redeemer reveals his mercy, love, and immanence. The merciful God of redemption is neither opposed to himself nor to the universe he has created. That he is Creator means he has the power to accomplish his will; that he is Redeemer means that he has the will and the motive to act for the deliverance and the welfare of his people. Both images of God are essential to see clearly the God who exists and loves. (390-391).
  2. Garrett also summarizes well: “Israel’s festivals were communal and commemorative as well as theological and typological.
    - a. They were communal in that they drew the nation together for celebration and worship as they recalled the common origin and experience of the people.
    - b. They were commemorative in that they kept alive the story of what God had done in the Exodus and during the sojourn.

- c. They were theological in that the observance of the festivals presented the participants with lessons on the reality of sin, judgment, and forgiveness, on the need for thanksgiving to God, and on the importance of trusting God rather than hoarding possessions.
  - d. They were typological in that they anticipated a greater fulfillment of the symbolism of the feasts. It is not surprising that each of the major feasts is in some way alluded to in the New Testament. On the other hand, the festivals could become meaningless rituals and were subject to the criticism of the prophets (Isa. 1:13-14).” (Elec. Ed., n.p.)
3. The festivals themselves served as a means of national unity as the people came together to worship before the Lord’s sanctuary. It reminded them of the role that the central sanctuary played in their relationship with God. They kept alive the memory of God’s past saving actions, reminding each successive generation of what God had made possible for them.

### Conclusion:

- I. The images of God revealed through Israel’s feasts set the trajectory for God’s continuing actions through redemptive history. Though the Mosaic system with all its sacrifices and festivals has been fulfilled in Jesus our great high priest who serves in a greater and more perfect tabernacle, the God who once commanded them has acted in history once more to redeem and provide.
  - A. Through Jesus, we experience the greatest redemption, viz., redemption from sin and its eternal consequences. We experience the freedom of His forgiveness and the hope of being in His eternal presence through the redemption of the body in the resurrection.
  - B. In the meantime, we enjoy His wonderful provision, not only for our physical needs, but for the abundant life Jesus gives His flock (Jn. 10:10).
- II. Consequently we worship Him “in spirit and in truth” (Jn. 4:24) -- not merely in the symbolism of the OT shadows, but in the reality of their NT fulfillment.
  - A. The church is His holy temple in which He dwells and in which He is glorified (Eph. 2:19-22).
  - B. Wherever God’s people may be on earth, they offer up continually the sacrifice of praise to God, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name (Heb. 13:15).
- III. Hopefully, we have learned the spiritual lessons taught by these feasts when we:
  - A. Cherish the experience of God’s redemption, remembering it in the breaking of bread each Lord’s day.
  - B. Share the good news of the gospel with those who have yet to hear and obey it.
  - C. Pause to give thanks regularly for the physical and spiritual provision He has made for us.
  - D. Remember those difficult times when God brought us through the “wilderness” of trouble and rejoice in His present provision.
  - E. Prioritize our spending to show gratitude to God for His provision by giving generously to His work.

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