

Yahweh's Appointed Times

"In the last day, that Great Day of the Feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, *If any man thirst, let him COME UNTO ME, and drink*"—John 7:37

LEVITICUS 23: THE MOSAIC YEARLY CYCLE

THIS chapter speaks of the yearly feasts, or rather 'appointed times' of the Mosaic Law. The Jewish months were lunar. The years were solar, as ours. Each month started with a new moon. The cycle of the moon is just a little over 29½ days, so the months alternated 29 and 30 days, with two 30-day months coming together whenever the fraction over 29½ accumulated to a day.

The year normally had 12 months or new moons, which is 354 or 355 days: 10 or 11 days short of the solar year, so an extra month was added about every 3 years (actually 7 times in 19 years) to keep the year in harmony with the seasons.

At the present time, the month Abib or Nisan, scripturally the 1st month, begins with the first new moon after the spring equinox (the date that night and day are equal: Mar. 20 or 21). This year (1978), Abib began with the new moon on Apr. 8.

If there is a new moon after the 12th month *before* the spring equinox, then the 13th month is added to the year, so that Abib, the first month of the next year, does not start before the equinox.

By some method like this, the year was kept in balance with the seasons in Bible times, but the exact method is not known.

By God's command at the time of the Exodus—12: 2 the year was to begin with the month Abib—roughly corresponding with April. So obviously it had been different before that. Jews today begin the year with the 7th Biblical month: approximately October. This custom goes far back into history, and this was probably the beginning of the year before it was changed to the Passover month. It may seem strange to us to begin a year as winter is approaching, but for an agricultural people in that area, it was very logical. It was another natural dividing line—the autumn equinox, and it was the end and beginning of the agricultural year. All harvests were completed by September: plowing and planting for the coming year began in October. In 1978, the modern Jewish New Year begins with the new moon on October 2.

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The Mosaic memorial periods are all based upon the number seven. Seven is completeness: not just completeness as such, but completeness *in God*—completeness of holiness and rest and absorption into God. Seven is the basic cycle: 8 is a new beginning. 'Scientists' have many theories to explain the widespread use of the 7-day week, as it has no relation to any astronomical phenomena, like the month and the year. The obvious and true explanation, of course, escapes them.

The basic memorial day was the 7th—the Sabbath—when God rested from His completed Creation work, & saw that all was good. Consequently, we find this chapter begins—v. 3 with the Sabbath law: the primary 'holy convocation—that is '*sacred assembly*': a gathering & uniting for holiness and worship.

Beside the weekly Sabbath, there were 7 yearly 'holy convocations'—

1. The *first* day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread: Abib 15.
2. The *last* day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread: Abib 21.
3. The one-day Feast of Weeks: Pentecost—50 days after the Passover.
4. The Feast of Trumpets: first day of the 7th month.
5. The Day of Atonement: tenth day of the 7th month.
6. The *first* day of the Feast of Tabernacles: 15th day of the 7th month.
7. The day *after* the end of the Feast of Tabernacles: *the great culminating day of the yearly cycle*: 22nd of 7th month.

On none of these days could 'servile' work (relating to daily occupations) be done. On one of them—the Day of Atonement—as on the weekly Sabbath, no work of any kind (even preparing meals) was permitted.

The yearly 'feasts' or 'appointed times' had several purposes, all directed to Israel's spiritual well-being & fellowship with God. These ordinances organized their lives into an active & profitable pattern centred in and pointing ever toward God. They gave Israel—

Religious and devotional activity: organized worship and praise;

Repeated, regular remembrance of God's goodness and deliverance;

Wholesome, God-centred pleasure and rest and change;

Instruction in divine things and human duties;

National unity and cohesiveness and purpose and meaning;

Types and shadows of the Eternal Divine Purpose of Redemption, and

Fellowship and communion and friendship with God in holiness.

As mentioned, 7 was the basic pattern and theme—

The 7th-day Sabbath.

The 7th month the culmination and most sacred.

The 7th year a Sabbath for the land itself.

7 x 7 years to each Jubilee: a complete new beginning again— *all bondage ended; all debts cancelled; all heritages restored.*

2 x 7 days to the Passover, on Abib 14.

7 x 7 days to Pentecost.

7 days each for the Feasts of Unleavened Bread and Tabernacles, and—

7 yearly days of holy convocation.

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v. 2: 'the feasts (set times) of Yahweh.' There are 2 different words used in this chapter for 'feast.' Neither means 'feast' or has anything to do with eating. Where plural (as here), it is *mo'ad*, meaning 'set time, appointed season,' and it is so translated elsewhere—Gen 1: 14; 17: 21; 18: 14 . It is applied to the Day of Atonement, a day of mourning and fasting.

When 'feast' is singular (as v. 6), the original is *chag*, literally, 'a pilgrimage to a sanctuary.' It occurs over 70 times and, with rare exceptions, always applies to the 3 yearly occasions Israel must assemble before the Lord: Passover, Pentecost, and Feast of Tabernacles.

These 3 great pilgrimages or *chags* were in the 1st, 3rd & 7th months. *All* (except the Passover day itself, which commemorated the Egyptian deliverance) were based on and related to the agricultural year— the sowing & the harvest: the seed dying and rising again to 100-fold fuller life. It was a wholesome agricultural life, as in the Millennium.

This chapter does not go into the details of the sacrifices offered on these occasions: that is all given in Numbers 28 & 29. There were 3 kinds of animal sacrifices, offered in this order—

CLEANSING: Sin offerings: partaken of by priest. Forgiveness, reconciliation.

DEDICATION: Whole burnt offerings; completely consumed on the altar: total dedication to, & absorption into, God. And—

FELLOWSHIP: Peace offerings: partaken of by offerer himself (as well as priest). Communion and fellowship with God.

Beside these *animal* sacrifices, there were the—

Meal offerings: of cereal, though called 'Meat' in AV: recognizing God's provision in all things, & sanctifying all one's possessions to God's use, and—

Drink offerings: of wine: rejoicing and thanksgiving.

v. 4 begins to enumerate the yearly ordinances—

v. 5: the Passover, on Abib 14. This introduced, & ran into—

vs. 6-8: The 7-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, Abib 15-21. The 1st & last days were the first 2 of the 7 'holy convocations' of the year when no work could be done. The unleavened bread (from the Passover meal) was the feature that bound the Passover to this Feast.

vs. 9-14 describe the offering of the wave-sheaf of Firstfruits. This was barley, for that was the grain that ripened first. The grain-sowing began, as mentioned, in October, & the grain harvest was from about mid-April to mid-June, beginning with barley & ending with wheat.

This sheaf was just as it came from the field: the very first springing of the new year's harvest. It was offered on the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread—the 16th of Abib—the day following the holy convocation Sabbath of the 15th, which began the feast.

This Abib 16 was the day Christ rose: having died as the Passover Lamb on the 14th, and having lain in the tomb and rested on the sabbath of the 15th. In the crucifixion year, this holy convocation sabbath was also the weekly Sabbath, as was fitting for the type. Christ was thus the Passover Lamb that *died*, and the Firstfruit Sheaf that sprang forth to *new life* 2 days later—on the 3rd day.

The Passover-Unleavened Bread ordinance appears to apply more particularly to Christ; as the Pentecost does to the Firstfruit Redeemed of this age; and the great final Feast of Tabernacles does to the harvest of the Millennium.

v. 14 instructs that none of the produce of the new year could be partaken of till the Firstfruit Sheaf had been offered to God. All waited upon *that* to open the way to the partaking of God's blessing. We are reminded that the 7-Sealed Scroll of the Eternal Divine Purpose could not be unfolded for the ultimate blessing of mankind until the Slain Lamb appeared who was worthy—Rev. 5:2-6. Paul, referring to this way-opening and sanctifying Sheaf—Rom. 11:16, says that if the Firstfruit be holy, then the 'whole lump' or body of the harvest is holy & acceptable.

vs. 15-22 give the ordinance of the Feast of Weeks—Exodus 34: 22, or Feast of Harvest—Exodus 23:16, or Day of Firstfruits—Numbers 28:26: later called Pentecost because it was 50 days from the Passover.

This was also a Firstfruits. As Christ is the Firstfruit of all to God, so the Redeemed of the present age are the Firstfruits unto him from mankind. The term is applied to both in the NT, and *this* ordinance seems to specially apply to, and be fulfilled in, the brethren of Christ.

Israel were—v. 15 to count 7 full weeks from the day they offered the Firstfruit Sheaf, then—v. 16 the next day was this Feast of Weeks. As in the crucifixion year, Abib 16 (the day Christ rose & the Sheaf was offered)

was a Sunday, or first day of the week, so would *this* Pentecost day be, 50 days later: *another* new beginning. On this day the Spirit was poured out on the Apostles, and they went forth to call out the Firstfruits unto God from all mankind.

On this day—v. 17 they were to offer 2 *loaves* which were baked from the new *wheat* harvest—Exodus 34: 22. We note here 2 things—

First, there were *two* loaves: Jew & Gentile: the 2 folds; the 2 olive branches & 2 candlesticks: the 2 sideposts of the Christ-Doorway, of which he is the crowning and connecting lintel. And—

Second, they were *leavened*. Now the Law was very strict about prohibiting leaven in anything to do with the sacrifices—Leviticus 2: 11. Leaven is 'malice & wickedness'—1Cor. 5:8—sin—and it made any offering it was connected with an abomination.

This ordinance, & one other place concerning the law of the Peace offering—Leviticus 7: 13, are unique in *requiring* leaven in the offerings to God. Clearly God is not condoning or countenancing sin. That is ruled out by every reasonable consideration, and the whole bulk of the Word.

But this has some reference to sin; some cognizance of imperfection. 'There is no man that sinneth not.' If perfect sinlessness were required, none could be saved. These loaves were—v. 17 'out of your habitation': that is, the ordinary daily bread, just as it was. Surely we have a merciful

indication here that—without for a moment belittling the seriousness of sin and the necessity of its complete removal—God accepts us as we are constituted in our present imperfect state and imperfect service, **IF**—*and only if*—we are completely dedicated (offered) to Him, and striving constantly to obey Him.

This Pentecost ordinance was the only occasion in the yearly feasts where a Peace offering was required—v. 19. We have just noted that apart from the Pentecost ordinance, the ordinance of the Peace, or Fellowship-with-God, offering was the only occasion in the Law where leaven was required, or even permitted. Both come together here.

Pentecost was the 3rd of the 7 yearly days of holy convocation, in which no servile work could be done—v. 21. All activity must be for God.

v. 22 adds another feature without which the service and worship of the day would have been a mockery: *goodness to others*, provision for the needy, love of neighbour, service to mankind. No man liveth to himself—Rom. 14: 7. Professed love of and service to God that does not inseparably involve love of neighbour is sterile and dead. None can be saved who does not give his life to the welfare of others.

vs. 23-25 give the law of the Feast of Trumpets: 4th of the 7 days of holy convocation. Passover & Unleavened Bread were in the first month; Pentecost in the 3rd (3 is resurrection). In the Law, the pattern of cleansing was often 1-3-7—Numbers 19: 12; 31: 19.

We are now beginning the 7th month, and 4 of the 7 holy convocation days occur in this one month alone, including the most solemn one of all: the Day of Atonement.

The year is coming to a climax. From Passover to Pentecost was the range of the grain harvest: mid-April to mid-June. There is nothing in the 4th, 5th & 6th months. But now we come to late September and early October, when *all* harvests—fruit, wine & oil—are in.

All months, and all feasts, were introduced by the blowing of trumpets—Numbers 10: 10, but the 1st day of the 7th month was the *especial* yearly occasion of trumpet-blowing. Trumpets are proclamations, calls to attention, to assembly & to battle, calls of warning, of instruction.

This 7th month trumpet announces the beginning of the end. The 7th Trumpet of the Revelation speaks of the 'finishing of the Mystery of God, as spoken by His servants the prophets'—Rev. 10:7. Pre-eminently, the trumpet-voice is the calling to the resurrection—

"The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised" (1 Cor. 15:52).

There were special Temple sacrifices on this day—Numbers 29:16, but it was not a national assembly to Jerusalem: rather an alerting of the land to the beginning of the solemn, climactic 7th month—and especially of the approach of the great and dreadful Day of Atonement. Dreadful, that is, if approached without the deepest reverence and solemnity & humility. Atonement Day was 5th of the 7 holy convocations.

vs. 26-32 give the instructions for that day—10th of the 7th month—when all normal activity was completely suspended for 24 hours throughout the whole land, and every Israelite must 'afflict his soul' on pain of death—v. 29. Three times in these verses is this affliction of the soul strictly commanded. And 3 times they are charged to do *absolutely no work*.

What did this 'afflicting the soul' consist of? Clearly it involved *external* aspects, for whoever did not comply was to be put to death—v. 29. It would certainly involve abstinence from food, and from all fleshly pleasures and enjoyments. This day became known as 'the Fast'—Acts 27:9. This was the one great day of the year to bring sin to remembrance: for a man to 'examine himself: to labour mightily for self-purification and to seek the cleansing and mercy of God.

Fasting of itself was not specifically prescribed, nor would it *of itself* have been acceptable—Isaiah 58:5. In not prescribing specific rituals of affliction, the attention would be directed to the inner aspects—the realities: inward examination and repentance and humility and rededication of the heart, soul, strength and mind to God.

This was the day when even the normal priestly ministrations at the Tabernacle stopped—Lev. 16:17, and the holy precincts were silent & empty while the High Priest alone went about his solemn, once-a-year task of making reconciliation for the nation: entering—on this dread day only—the inner sanctuary of the Most Holy, beyond the Veil, where the glory of God rested between the Cherubim, above the golden Ark.

This day of all days called for a humble and contrite spirit: no levity, no lightness, no manifestation of rejoicing, no self-pleasing, no going thoughtlessly about one's ordinary activities and pleasures. The entire nation in affliction and mourning, conscious of the great burden and disease of sin and fleshliness and self-will—

"Whosoever shall not be afflicted shall be *cut off from among his people.*"

There is a historic counterpart to this great day. Indeed, this would be the final national climax to which this day in type pointed in all its ages of observance. Did Israel have any idea of what the High Priest's ministrations on this memorable day foreshadowed?—

"They shall look upon Me Whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn .. a great mourning... and the land shall mourn, every family apart" (Zech. 12:10).

So this sombre day was passed: 24 hours 'from even to even'—v. 32.

But once every 50 years, as darkness fell and this day of affliction and mourning ended, there was a striking and unusual event, all the more striking by its contrast with the hushed mourning of the day.

Suddenly, just as the day ended—beginning at Jerusalem & picked up in ever-widening circles until the echoes rang throughout the whole land—the joyful trumpets of the Jubilee began to sound. The day of affliction and mourning was over, and the day of freedom and release and a completely new beginning had begun—another wonderful type.

The rest of the chapter—vs. 33-42 speaks of the Feast of Tabernacles: the 7 days from the 15th to the 21st of the 7th month.

'Tabernacles' should really be translated 'Booths,' for it is an entirely different word from the 'Tabernacle' of God, which is *Mishkan* or 'dwelling place.' The word here is *succhoth*, meaning 'hut or booth,' a rough, simple, temporary shelter—usually of tree branches, from a word meaning 'to entwine.'

This Feast was primarily to remind them of the 40 years in the wilderness—v. 43. It was thus a memorial of both the *deliverance* from bondage, and the *afflictions* of the journey. It was also called the Feast of Ingathering—Exodus 23: 16, and as such it was the joyful thanksgiving for the bounties and blessings of God throughout the year. It was the great Rest, after all the year's labours, when all the harvests were in.

The first day of this 7-day ordinance was the 6th holy convocation.

And this feast was the 3rd and last of those in which all Israel must assemble at God's Tabernacle. They were there required to build simple little booths—v. 40 of tree branches, and live in them for the week of the feast: high and low, rich and poor together—v. 42. In their harvest joy they were reminded that we have here no continuing city, and should not set our interest on present things. In the later corruptions of the nation, the faithful Rechabites carried forward this memorial in their lives, dwelling simply in temporary dwellings—Jeremiah 35: 7.

They were to take palm-branches, and willow-branches—v. 40. Palms throughout Scripture represent joy & victory: willows represent oppression and sorrow—illustrating both aspects of the memorial. God's loving purpose with mankind of redemption & glory manifests throughout these twin aspects of joy through sorrow, peace through suffering, rest through labour, and exaltation through humility: that no flesh should glory.

As the Passover is Christ, and Pentecost is the Redeemed from the present, so the Feast of Tabernacles is the great millennial harvest of the earth. Each in its turn is a harvest: the Firstfruit Sheaf, the Firstfruit Loaves, and the total Ingathering.

The sacrifices of this week—Numbers 29 were much more than at any other of the memorial periods: 70 bullocks, 14 rams, 98 lambs. But the bullocks (the principal sacrifice) *diminish* day by day to a perfect unity and completeness of 7 on the last day. Here, as bro. Roberts points out, is a winding down of sacrifice; an approaching the end of the need of sacrifice: an approaching the time when all shall have been brought into perfect subjection to God, and God shall be all in all.

This was the Feast of *Ingathering*. It was a thankful celebration of God's blessing in the harvest, and all centred round the harvest. But once in every 7 years there was no harvest to celebrate. Once in 7 yrs. they neither sowed nor reaped, & what grew of itself was for the poor.

During the feast that year, the procedure was different. It was the Sabbatical year. That year, the Law of Moses was to be read and explained to the nation as it was assembled for this week—Lev. 25: 4.

The whole preceding year had been a year of rest from daily labour. Ideally, it was a year of learning and meditation and study of the Word. How fitting, then, at this final great week-long assembly *that* year, the time should be given to proclamation and discussion of the Law of God that makes wise unto salvation!

Israel being what they were, it is to be doubted if this ideal occupation of the sabbatical year ever materialized to any appreciable degree or length of time, but how wonderful it *could* have been! What wonderful opportunities they had! What a wise and ideal set-up! But how few, in any generation or dispensation, have had the wisdom to use their God-given (and God-owned) leisure time profitably or scripturally! What needless tragedy the judgment seat will reveal!

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The yearly ordinances were now over: the 7 days in booths ended. Only one last event remained—the final day of holy convocation: the day *following* the Feast of Tabernacles: the 8th day of new beginning:

V. 34: "The Feast of Tabernacles for *seven days* unto the Lord."

V. 36: "*Seven days* shall ye offer an offering... On the EIGHTH day shall be a holy convocation ... It is a solemn *assembly* . . ."

The original word here for 'assembly' is different. It only occurs a few times, usually applied to this particular day. Note that the margin has 'day of restraint.' Rather it means 'day of closing': a closing ceremony. It is *atzereth*, from *atzar*, 'to close, to restrain, to shut up.'

This was the final day of the cycle: the day over and beyond the 3 yearly feasts. They were no longer in the booths, representing the wilderness journey. The sacrifices for the Feast of Tabernacles had come to a climax with the gradual reduction of the bullocks to 7.

In the symmetrical pattern of the 3 yearly feasts at the national centre of worship, this final great day balances out the Passover day by which the pattern began—

<i>First the one-day Passover, immediately followed</i>	1 day
<i>by the 7-day Feast of Unleavened Bread.</i>	7 days
<i>The second, middle yearly assembly was just one day—</i>	1 day
<i>Pentecost, in the 3rd month.</i>	
<i>The third yearly assembly was the 7-day Feast of Tabernacles,</i>	7 days
<i>immediately followed by this special, separate 8th day.</i>	1 day

In John 7 is a record of the last Feast of Tabernacles that was kept before Moses' Law was nailed to the cross & for ever done away. V. 37—

"In the last day, that *Great Day of the Feast*, Jesus stood up and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him COME UNTO ME and drink."

A call to leave the passing-away shadows, and come to the great reality. We can picture what a commotion this would cause.

This 'Great Day' was the culminating 8th day that closed the Mosaic yearly cycle: the *Atzereth*, the 'closing ceremony.' Little did Israel realize the significance of THAT Day. *The Mosaic cycle, after 1500 revolutions, had run its course for the last time.*

As the next cycle began, with the Passover of the next year, the *true* Passover Lamb himself fulfilled in one-time reality the age-old & oft-repeated shadowy type, and the shadows forever vanished away.

The Jews carried on robot-like with the dead rituals for another 37 years, till reality was forced upon them by the terrible events of AD 70.

And there will truly be *memorial* Passover and *memorial* Feast of Tabernacles in the Kingdom of God—Ezekiel 45:21-25, but under the new Abrahamic Covenant, not the old Mosaic—

"*Not according to the Covenant, saith the Lord, that I made with their fathers when I brought them out of the land of Egypt*" (Jer. 31:31; Heb.8:8).

That New Eternal Covenant has been confirmed by the blood of the true Passover Lamb.

—G.V.G.
