



Studies in the Book of Exodus

Text
Exodus 23:10-19

Topic
The Lord gives Israel a calendar that stipulates a weekly rest day, annual feast days, and regular rest years

Title
"Father Knows Rest"

"Time may fly when you're having fun, but when you're bored, *it scrolls.*"

With a hook that clever, I had to keep reading. It was an article about the native calendar on your iPhone. Apparently you can scroll indefinitely *backward* or *forward* in time:

- Scrolling backward, one person reported that when you reach year 1AD, it jumps to 1BC.
- The farthest anyone claims to have scrolled in the future is the year 60313.

My iPhone calendar likes to automatically alert me to certain holidays I've never heard of - like Eid al-Fitr. It's on the US Holidays calendar.

So are the Lunar New Year and something called Diwali.

We've come a long way since day planners and the Rolodex. There are seemingly endless calendar apps; and everyone has to have multiple calendars that need to be synced with one another.

Plus your calendars need to be synced with others in your family or at your workplace.

If you long for simpler times, you'll like our text in Exodus. It presents the calendar of Israel, and it's pretty easy to understand:

- You worked for six days, then the seventh day was a day of rest for all individuals.
- After six years, the entire seventh year would be a time of extended rest for the land.
- Meanwhile, three times per calendar year there would be feasts that every adult male Jew was mandated to attend.

It was definitely a cool calendar.

Not that we want to adopt their calendar, or its observances. We don't. The apostle Paul instructed believers in the church age, "Let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths" (Colossians 2:16).

We have zero obligation to follow anything on the calendar God established for Israel.

Doesn't mean we can't learn from it. Their work, and their worship, were planned out years in advance. It had built-in rest, and it was meant to be festive.

I'll organize my comments around two points: #1 Your Work For The Lord Ought To Be Restful, and #2 Your Worship Of The Lord Ought To Be Festal.

#1 Your Work For The Lord Ought To Be Restful

(v10-13)

Under California law if you are a non-exempt worker, you are entitled to meal and rest breaks:

- A 30-minute meal break if you work more than 5 hours in a workday.
- 10 minute breaks for every 4 hours you work.

A recent scientific study found that the most productive formula is to work for 52 minutes followed by a 17 minute break. **All day** - not just once or twice. That adds-up to 90 minutes in breaks.

I'm sure your boss will immediately implement the 52/17 schedule once you tell him or her you heard it from the pulpit.

The Israelites had been slaves charged with making bricks in Egypt. That was their day job. Off-time was spent sowing and harvesting their crops, and tending to their livestock.

In the recent past, during the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh, they were required to make the same quota of bricks but without being provided the necessary straw.

So on top of everything else, they had to go out and gather their own straw. It was brutal daily labor.

The Promised Land would involve a much more relaxed pace.

Exo 23:10 "Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce,

This is what I would have heard as a recently redeemed Israelite: "Your land," and "produce."

- God was giving them a land of their own; and He was speaking as if it were a done deal.
- It wasn't hardpan or swampland. It was going to be incredibly productive.

I'm sure they were chomping at the bit to get to work. God was going to rein them in a bit.

Exo 23:11 but the seventh *year* you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat. In like manner you shall do with your vineyard *and* your olive grove.

As an aside, I've got to ask: If you are a Sabbatarian who farms, do you follow this Sabbath rule today?

Part of the challenge to obeying this was believing that God would either give you an increase in your sixth-year crops, or see you through with what you harvested. It required faith.

In practice, Israel would miserably fail. At one point they would ignore the Sabbath year for 490 years straight.

God therefore set the time of Israel's captivity in Babylon at 70 years - *the exact number of Sabbath years they had worked rather than rested.*

Though fallow, the fields would still produce. A benefit of fallow fields was that "the poor" could glean from them; and wild animals could, too.

This doesn't mean that they only ate every seven years. It means that they feasted every seven years. During the six years of regular crops the poor could glean:

- Leviticus 19:9-10 instructs Israelites to leave the margins of their grain fields unharvested. The width of this margin appears to be up to the owner to decide.
- They were not to pick up whatever produce fell to the ground. This would apply when a harvester grasped a bundle of stalks and cut them with the sickle, as well as when grapes fell from a cluster just cut from the vine.
- They were to harvest their vineyards just once, presumably taking only the ripe grapes so as to leave the later ripening ones.

The exciting thing - the thing we can overlook - is that God was giving them a huge time of rest. *The Israelites got a year off every six years.*

It was a rest that required them to trust in God. It might be their land, and it might be on account of hard work their crops produced. But it was only because of God that they were being blessed. To ignore the Sabbath year and sow crops was to disbelieve God.

Our work, as believers, ought to be restful. It's not by might, nor by power, that we produce anything for the Lord. It is all by His Spirit. Jesus said partnering with Him would make for rest.

That doesn't mean we are idle. It isn't "Let go and Let God." No, we are to be spiritual workaholics. For example: We are told to pray "without ceasing." That sounds intense - and it is.

But our work is done by His empowering; and we are not to get proud and think our effort is the reason we are blessed, or that it merits us more favor from God.

Exo 23:12 Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed.

Sabbatarians argue that God established the keeping of the Sabbath day in Genesis when He rested on the seventh day of creation. If that were the case, why must He tell Israel to keep the Sabbath? If it had been the pattern since creation, they would have defaulted to it once freed from slavery in Egypt.

God's seventh-day rest in Genesis was not a perpetual moral command. It wasn't something you see Adam do weekly; or any of the patriarchs. It started with Israel in the wilderness.

Exo 23:13 "And in all that I have said to you, be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth.

This exhortation makes sense when you remember that the land they were going to possess was filled with Canaanites who worshipped any number of gods.

They'd need to be on guard. More than on guard. The word translated "circumspect" means "to *hedge* about (as with thorns)."

They were to practice *spiritual* agriculture by planting a hedge of thorns to protect their hearts from other gods.

The command was pretty strict: Don't even mention the gods; their names should never even be heard coming out of their mouths.

It would have been impossible to worship these gods if Israel had taken this literally.

Are there things God doesn't want you to see... Or to hear... Or to say? Probably. Be literal about it and you won't be drawn in.

I've said enough for us to know that we are not subject to the Sabbath. We've covered this in previous studies anytime the Sabbath comes up in the text. Rather than go over that ground again, I want to share something a lot more encouraging to our walk with the Lord - a topic that is suggested by the Sabbath.

It has to do with the number seven. It seems to be a super-important number in the Word of God. We've already seen that the seventh day was a Sabbath, and the seventh year was a Sabbath. There was also going to be a Jubilee year after every seven cycles of Sabbath years; that is, every 50th year. According to Leviticus, slaves and prisoners would be freed, debts would be forgiven, and the mercies of God would be particularly manifest (25:8-13).

We will read about three annual feasts, but in all there will be a total of seven biblical feasts. Concerning the feasts:

- Every 7th month was holy and had 3 feasts.
- There were 7 weeks between Passover and Pentecost.
- The Passover feast lasted 7 days.
- The Feast of Tabernacles lasted 7 days.
- At Passover 14 lambs (7 twice) were offered daily.
- At Tabernacles 14 lambs (7 twice) and 70 bullocks were offered.
- At Pentecost 7 lambs were offered.

It doesn't stop with that. The recurrence of the number seven - or an exact multiple of seven - is found throughout the Bible. Bear with me while I mention a few:

- Seven pairs of clean animals were taken on the Ark. In addition, the Ark came to rest in the seventh month.
- In Joseph's time, there were seven years of plenty and the seven years of famine in Egypt.
- Animals were to be at least seven days old before being used for sacrifice.
- Leprous Naaman had to bathe in the Jordan River seven times to be healed.

Sevens surrounded the conquest of Jericho:

- The Israelites marched around Jericho for seven days.
- On the seventh day they had to make seven circuits.
- Seven priests blew seven trumpets outside the city walls.

The prophet Daniel described God's prophetic plan for Israel as lasting seventy weeks of seven years each.

Jumping to the New Testament:

- Jesus told Peter to forgive "Seventy times seven."

- There are seven “I AM” statements in the Gospel of John.
- There are seven miracles recorded in the Gospel of John.

In the Revelation there are a slew of sevens:

- Jesus writes seven letters to the seven churches represented by seven lamp stands.
- Seven spirits minister before the throne in Heaven.
- Jesus opens a seven sealed scroll, revealing seven trumpets and seven bowls of wrath.
- There are seven stars, seven horns, seven eyes, seven angels, seven thunders, seven heads, seven crowns, seven plagues, seven hills, and seven kings.

You should be familiar with the ministry of Chuck Missler. If not, find him on YouTube. He recently went home to glory.

I watched a brief video in which he described what is called the “heptadic structure” of Scripture. Heptad is a fancy word that means *seven* or *a group of seven*. Using the first seventeen verses of the Gospel of Matthew (which contain the genealogy of Jesus), Missler revealed a hidden structure in the words themselves regarding the number seven or its multiples. Missler said:

There are 72 Greek vocabulary words in these initial 17 verses:

- The number of words which are nouns is exactly 56, or 7 x 8.
- The Greek word “the” occurs most frequently in the passage: exactly 56 times, or 7 x 8. Also, the number of different forms in which the article “the” occurs is exactly 7.

- There are two main sections in the passage: verse 1–11, and 12–17. In the first main section, the number of Greek vocabulary words used is 49, or 7×7 .
- Of these 49 words, the number of those beginning with a vowel is 28, or 7×4 . The number of words beginning with a consonant is 21, or 7×3 .
- The total numbers of letters in these 49 words is 266, or 7×38 - exactly!
- The number of vowels among these 266 letters is 140, or 7×20 .
- The number of consonants is 126, or 7×18 - exactly.
- Of the 49 words, the number of words which occur more than once is 35, or 7×5 .
- The number of words occurring only once is 14, or 7×2 .
- The number of words which occur in only one form is exactly 42, or 7×6 .
- The number of words appearing in more than one form is also 7.
- The number of the 49 Greek vocabulary words which are nouns is 42, or 7×6 .
- The number of words which are not nouns is 7.
- Of the nouns, 35 are proper names, or exactly 7×5 . These 35 names are used 63 times, or 7×9 . The number of male names is exactly 28, or 7×4 . These male names occur 56 times or 7×8 . The number which are not male names is 7.
- Three women are mentioned - Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth. The number of Greek letters in these three names is 14, 7×2 .
- The number of compound nouns is 7. The number of Greek letters in these 7 nouns is 49, or 7×7 .
- Only one city is named in this passage, Babylon, which in Greek contains exactly 7 letters.

Missler based a lot of his stuff on the earlier work of Ivan Panin. In Genesis 1:1, Panin discovered an incredible phenomenon of multiples of seven:

- The number of Hebrew words is 7.
- The number of letters equals 28 (7x4).
- The first three Hebrew words translated “In the beginning God created” have 14 letters (7x2).
- The last four Hebrew words translated “The heavens and the earth” have 14 letters (7x2).
- The fourth and fifth words have 7 letters.
- The sixth and seventh words have 7 letters.

There are many other sevens as well; but those should be more than enough to show that, underneath the inspired words of Scripture, **there is a supernatural structure that gives evidence for divine design.** The odds of heptadic structure being possible, even using a supercomputer, are nearly incalculable.

The apostle Paul said, “let no man judge you [regarding] sabbaths.” When the church council met in the Book of Acts to determine if Gentiles were obligated to keep the Mosaic Law, including the Sabbath, the answer that an entirely Jewish panel gave was an emphatic, “No!”

Instead of getting bogged-down by the Sabbath, let’s talk about the awesomeness of our God, Who has given us His signature in things like heptadic structure. This book IS the Word of God.

#2 Your Worship Of The Lord Ought To Be Festal

(v14-19)

After I read that article on scrolling back in time on the calendar, I went to my birthday in 1955. It fell on a Sunday. This year, it's on a Tuesday.

Do you ever wonder how George Washington's birthday can always fall on the third Monday in February?

The Uniform Monday Holiday Act is an Act of Congress that amended the federal holiday provisions of the United States Code to establish the observance of certain holidays on Mondays. The Act was signed into law on June 28, 1968, and took effect on January 1, 1971.

The Act moved Washington's Birthday (February 22), Memorial Day (May 30), and Veterans Day (November 11) from fixed dates to designated Mondays, and established as a federal holiday Columbus Day - which had previously been celebrated in some states on October 12 - to a designated Monday.

Veterans Day was removed from this list of "always-on-Monday" holidays when it was moved back to its traditional date of November 11, by act of Congress in 1975, effective 1978.

Though the holiday was not in existence at the time, Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday (established 1983) is celebrated on the third Monday in January, instead of King's actual birth date, January 15.

The Act was designed to increase the number of three-day weekends for federal employees. Not that I'm complaining. I like a long weekend as much as the next person.

Pity poor Israel. As far as I can tell, Israel had no holidays until the Exodus. Then, all of a sudden, they had three involving pilgrimage.

Exo 23:14 "Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year:
Exo 23:15 You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty);

The Feast of Unleavened Bread includes Passover (which immediately precedes it), and Firstfruits (which ends it). For example, this year Passover was, on our calendar, March 31st-April 1st; Unleavened Bread was April 1st thru April 8th, with Firstfruits falling on April 7th-8th.

The Israelites went in haste from Egypt, having no time to spare. This was symbolized by eating bread that didn't have time to rise.

Exo 23:16 and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field...

The Feast of Harvest is also known as the Feast of Weeks, or the Feast of 50 Days, because it begins 50 days after Passover. We know this feast as Pentecost, which translates roughly to *fifty days*. This year, Pentecost was May 26th-27th.

Exo 23:16 ... and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in *the fruit of your labors* from the field.

This is the Feast of Tabernacles, or Booths, when the Jews live outdoors in temporary shelters.

This year it will be September 24th thru October 1st. It will be preceded by two other holy days - the Feast of Trumpets on September 10th-11th; and the Day of Atonement five days before, on September 19th-20th.

These appointed times gave thanks for the harvest. They were agricultural celebrations. But they also commemorated three important spiritual things:

- The Feast of Unleavened Bread commemorated the Passover when the lamb's blood sprinkled on the doorpost redeemed them from the death of every firstborn.
- Pentecost commemorated the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai - believed traditionally to be fifty days after Passover.
- The Feast of Tabernacles commemorated God's continual provision for Israel in the wilderness.

They were constant reminders of the mercy and grace of God. O how we need reminding.

Exo 23:17 "Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD.

It was mandatory - but it was festive. It's like being ordered to celebrate. Like going to church; it's festive. If you find yourself burdened by going, you need to adjust your thinking.

Twice we've heard God say, "Appear before [Me]." We tend to forget that the Jews enjoyed the manifestation of the glory of God in the form of the pillar that was cloud by day and fire by night.

Exo 23:18 "You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor shall the fat of My sacrifice remain until morning.

The "blood... sacrifice" meant was the lamb offered at Passover. Leaven, or yeast, since it is a corrupting agent, was seen to represent sin. More rules would be given later, in Leviticus for example.

Exo 23:19 The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.

"First of the firstfruits" meant the first and best. It was a test of faith. The Israelites had to trust God would provide at the end of the harvest.

The case of the young goat in his mother's milk is baffling. Commentators can only guess at why it was so important. Here are their best guesses:

- Because it was an idolatrous practice.
- Because it was a magical (occult) practice to try to make the land more productive.
- Because it was cruel to destroy a baby goat in the very milk which sustained it.
- Because milk and meat are difficult to digest.

They don't know; Jewish commentators don't know; I certainly don't know, nor do I hazard a guess. I will say that it has nothing to do with health issues. There's nothing inherently wrong with the practice that would lead to illness.

I do know that it was a practice which would set them apart from their neighbors, leading to opportunities to share with Gentiles more about God.

Have you been troubled by folks who say we as Christians are wrong for ignoring the feasts? One recent group is being called the Hebrew Roots Movement. No question what they advocate: Return to the so-called Hebrew “roots” of our faith.

I like what one pastor said:

We have peace with God by trusting in the finished work of Christ alone. Add anything to that and you have fallen into a false gospel. You do not have peace with God by trusting in Christ *and* by being circumcised, or by trusting in Christ *and* keeping the Feast of Weeks. Add **anything** to the work of Christ, *and you lose the work of Christ.*

If you want to attend a Passover Seder, that’s OK. If you think it is necessary, or that it will elevate your Christian walk, that’s not OK. That’s not grace; that’s works.

The church has a very different ‘calendar’ than Israel has. We are told to live in daily expectation of the Lord’s return to resurrect and rapture us. We are to look forward to, and by doing so, hasten, the return of the Lord.

Every year there are predictions that Jesus is going to rapture us during the Feast of Trumpets, or on Pentecost. He may; but He may do so on any other day of the year.

My phone's operating system automatically populates my calendar with weird holidays. Ashura and Indigenous People's Day are right around the corner.

It would be better if, everyday, it began with a pop-up reminder that Jesus is coming.