

BIBLE BRIEFING

LEVITICUS

"Mark Your Calendar"

Chapter 23

Introduction

The nation of Israel followed a unique calendar based on the number seven. Every seventh day, every seventh month, every seventh year, and every year that followed seven times seven years was to be commemorated:

1. Every seventh day they rested.
2. Every seventh year the land rested,¹ debts were remitted,² and those Jews who had sold themselves into slavery were released.³
3. Every year that followed seven times seven years was the year of Jubilee. The land not only rested, but land that had been mortgaged reverted back to its original family of ownership.⁴

Their calendar revolved around seven feasts. There are three feasts in the first month of their year, and four feasts in the seventh month. Their calendar was of great *practical help* to the Jews. It was also of great *prophetic hope* to them. The days, feasts, and assemblies that were observed and celebrated on their calendar were and are an outline of God's prophetic plan for the nation!

Those days, feasts, and assemblies are presented to you in Leviticus Twenty-three. You see the weekly sabbath, the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the offering of the Firstfruits, Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

The Jewish year begins on the first day of the seventh month, with the Feast of Trumpets. Why not begin the list of days, feasts, and

¹Exodus 23:11

²Deuteronomy 15:1-4

³Deuteronomy 15:12

⁴Leviticus 25; see Unger's Bible Dictionary

assemblies from the first of the year? Because the particular order you find them in here in Leviticus Twenty-three is God's prophetic outline of history.

#1 Look At The Jewish Calendar And You'll See Jesus In His First Coming (v1-14)

Leviticus 23:1 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
Leviticus 23:2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts.

"Feasts" have nothing to do with eating. In fact, on the Day of Atonement, the people fasted. The word simply means "appointed times." "Convocation" gives the idea of all the people assembling together, but this also was not always the case. The word means "proclamation" or "announcement." The Lord *appointed* and *announced* these days, which the Jews were to faithfully keep.⁵

The Sabbath...
...was a day appointed and announced:

Leviticus 23:3 'Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings.

God gave the Sabbath to Israel for several reasons. Some were social. The Sabbath provided needed rest and refreshment for the people, the farm animals, and the land. Sabbath years and the Year of Jubilee were intended to keep the Jews from exploiting the land and one another.

The Sabbath was also a special sign between God and His covenant people, the Jews. In Exodus 31:12 you read,

Exodus 31:12 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
Exodus 31:13 "Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: 'Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.

⁵Wiersbe, *Be Holy*, page 102.

Exodus 31:14 'You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people.
Exodus 31:15 'Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.
Exodus 31:16 'Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.
Exodus 31:17 'It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.'"

Notice the emphasis as God says "it is a sign between Me and you," meaning "the generations of Israel." He says "the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath...throughout their generations." It is "a sign between Me and the children of Israel."

You are *not* Israel and you are not commanded to observe the Sabbath. What you are told regarding the Sabbath, in Colossians 2:16-17, is

Colossians 2:16 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,
Colossians 2:17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

Furthermore, Sunday is not to be understood as the New Testament Sabbath Day. The Sabbath is Saturday - or, more precisely, sundown Friday through sundown Saturday. Some Christians believe that Sunday has replaced Saturday as the new Sabbath, and that you should observe Sabbath laws of rest on Sunday. The Bible nowhere teaches this; it is a matter of individual conscience as to your activities on Sunday. The Church meets on Sunday because that is the day Jesus Christ rose from the dead, because that is the day on which the Church was born,⁶ and because that is the day that the first Christians met for worship.⁷

How does the Jewish Sabbath fit in to the prophetic outline of history? In Deuteronomy 5:15 you read,

⁶see McGee on "The Day of Pentecost," *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 1, page 429.

⁷Acts 20:7 & 1 Corinthians 16:2

Deuteronomy 5:15 And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

The weekly Sabbath reminded the Jews that they had been delivered from slavery in Egypt. This was to have a figurative meaning for them as well. Their enslavement in Egypt was symbolic of their enslavement to sin. Their deliverer from Egypt, Moses, was symbolic of their future Deliverer from sin, the Messiah. As the Jews looked back on their deliverance from Egypt, they were to look forward to their promised Deliverer from heaven.

The Sabbath looks forward to deliverance. It speaks to you of your sin and your need for salvation. If you think I am reading too much into the Sabbath, consider the order of Leviticus Twenty-three. God mentions the weekly Sabbath, then immediately speaks of Passover. The Sabbath speaks of deliverance from Egypt, and Passover reminds you that deliverance came through the blood of the lambs that were slain in Egypt. The Sabbath is indeed a picture of deliverance from sin by blood.

Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits...
...all commemorate Israel's deliverance. On the eve of God delivering the Jews from their 400 years of enslavement in Egypt, the head of each family took a male lamb and sacrificed it. The lamb had been chosen four days prior, and had been kept in the home. At the prescribed time, it was taken to the doorway and its throat slit. The blood was collected in a basin and then applied to the horizontal and vertical frame of the door. As the family inside ate the roasted lamb they had sacrificed, God's death angel passed over their home.

Passover, the sacrifice itself, is described in verses four and five:

Leviticus 23:4 'These are the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times.

Leviticus 23:5 'On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the Lord's Passover.

Passover was on the fourteenth day of the first month, called Nisan. The Feast of Unleavened Bread followed immediately and lasted seven days, from the 15th to the 21st:

Leviticus 23:6 'And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread.

Leviticus 23:7 'On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it.

Leviticus 23:8 'But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD for seven days. The seventh day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it.'"

Unleavened bread is bread made without yeast. Eating unleavened bread spoke of their hasty flight from Egypt and of their total break with their former life.

The day after the Feast of Unleavened Bread began, on the 16th of Nisan, was the offering of the Firstfruits of the harvest:

Leviticus 23:9 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Leviticus 23:10 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest.

Leviticus 23:11 'He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.

Leviticus 23:12 'And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the LORD.

Leviticus 23:13 'Its grain offering shall be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to the LORD, for a sweet aroma; and its drink offering shall be of wine, one-fourth of a hin.

Leviticus 23:14 'You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

Firstfruits indicated that a great harvest was to follow.

All of these events surrounding Passover speak of the first coming of Jesus Christ. Just as the sacrificial lamb was chosen four days prior to the Passover, Jesus entered Jerusalem four days prior to Passover. Jesus celebrated Passover with His disciples and was crucified. He was Israel's final sacrificial Lamb, offered up just at the right time to fulfill the symbolism.

Many Bible passages speak of Jesus as God's Lamb:

Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter...

John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

1 Peter 1:19 ...the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

The book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ has at least eight references to Jesus Christ as the sacrificial Lamb. To be absolutely clear, the Apostle Paul calls Jesus "our Passover...sacrificed for us."⁸

The Passover lamb was not to have a bone broken. The Roman soldier at the Cross of Jesus violated his standing orders by not breaking the legs of Jesus and unknowingly fulfilled prophecy!

Jesus is also the Bread of Life⁹ we feast on for eternal life, and He is unleavened. Leaven is a symbol of the corruption of sin. Jesus was without sin, represented by unleavened bread.

Firstfruits was celebrated on the day after the Sabbath following Passover, on the first day of the week - Sunday. It was on that very day that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. In 1 Corinthians 15:20 Jesus is called "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." He is the first to rise from the dead never to die again, and He is the first of a great harvest to come.

Jesus Christ, in His First Coming, fulfilled the types of these days and feasts in the exact time...

#2 Look At The Jewish Calendar And
You'll See Jesus In The Church Age
(v15-22)

⁸1 Corinthians 5:7

⁹John 6:35 & 48

These verses describe the Feast of Weeks, which came to be called Pentecost:

Leviticus 23:15 'And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed.

Leviticus 23:16 'Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD.

It was called the Feast of Weeks because it was seven weeks after Firstfruits. It came to be called Pentecost because it was celebrated on the day after seven weeks, the fiftieth day. *Pente* is a prefix for fifty.

The prophetic meaning of Pentecost is beyond question. It was on the Day of Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus Christ that the Church was born. Acts Chapter Two begins by saying, "**Now when the Day of Pentecost had fully come...**" It had "**fully come**" means the fulfillment of that for which it was given as a celebration in Leviticus.

Notice that the offerings on the Day of Pentecost involved waving two loaves before the Lord:

Leviticus 23:17 'You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the LORD.

The two loaves indicate God's dealings with two peoples during this age - the Jews and the Gentiles. Notice something else in verse seventeen: The loaves contain leaven. Leaven represents sin and the corruption of this world. There is sin and corruption in the Church today, represented by leaven in the loaves offered at Pentecost.

The Bible says that the Day of Pentecost was fulfilled. We live today in the Church Age. There is a four month gap between Pentecost and the next major calendar event. This speaks of the entire Church Age, a prophetic "gap" between the resurrection and return of Jesus during which He is calling a people unto Himself. The Church Age fills the gap.

#3 Look At The Jewish Calendar And You'll See Jesus In His Second Coming (v23-44)

Three calendar observances all occur during the seventh month: the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. On the first day of the seventh month, the trumpets were blown to announce the beginning of a new year. The tenth day was the Day of Atonement, and then came the Feast of Tabernacles which started on the fifteenth day of the seventh month and lasted seven days. These all look beyond our own day to God's future dealings with Israel. They are prophetic of the Last Days and the return of Jesus Christ to establish His Kingdom on earth.

The Feast of Trumpets...

...speaks of the gathering together of God's people, especially Israel. Some commentators feel that the exact reason for the observance of this feast is not clear. Numbers chapter ten describes the blowing of trumpets in the camp of Israel to gather them for various reasons. Gathering together a scattered people seems to be the consensus of its meaning. It also served to announce the imminence of the all important Day of Atonement.

Leviticus 23:23 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
Leviticus 23:24 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation.
Leviticus 23:25 'You shall do no customary work on it; and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD.'"

Trumpets play an important role in Israel's future. Because of their unbelief and rejection of Jesus Christ, Israel became a scattered people. But in the Last Days before Jesus Christ returns the Bible says Israel will be regathered in her land. Further, in the last few years before Jesus returns God will deal directly with Israel through the use of trumpets. There are seven trumpets in the Revelation which cover the seven year Great Tribulation. The Feast of Trumpets looks forward to God's dealings with the Jews leading up to and in the Great Tribulation.

The Church is probably in view here, too. Just prior to the Great Tribulation, the believers of the Church Age will be in-gathered together and caught-up in the Rapture as we hear the sound of a trumpet being blown:

1 Thessalonians 4:16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

The Day of Atonement...

...was the day on which God graciously atoned for the sins of His people. The Hebrew word *kapar*, translated "atonement," means "to ransom, to remove by paying a price." The Jewish priest placed his hands on the head of the sacrifice, symbolizing the transferring of the nation's sins to the innocent victim who died in their place.

Atonement means that a price is paid and blood is shed by an innocent substitute.

The Day of Atonement was fully described in chapter sixteen. Here, in chapter twenty-three, notice the emphasis is on "the affliction" of the Jews:

Leviticus 23:26 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

Leviticus 23:27 "Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD.

Leviticus 23:28 "And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God.

Leviticus 23:29 "For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people.

Leviticus 23:30 "And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people.

Leviticus 23:31 "You shall do no manner of work; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

Leviticus 23:32 "It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath."

The Day of Atonement was a day of affliction for the Jews that ushered in a new beginning in their relationship with God. In God's

prophetic outline, the Day of Atonement represents the Great Tribulation, especially the last three and one half years. It will be a time of great affliction upon the Jews, but it will usher in a new beginning in their relationship with God.

The Feast of Tabernacles...

...was a seven day period in this same seventh month during which the Jews dwelt outdoors in temporary tabernacles, or booths, to commemorate their wandering in the wilderness:

Leviticus 23:33 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Leviticus 23:34 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the LORD.

Leviticus 23:35 'On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it.

Leviticus 23:36 'For seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it...

Leviticus 23:39 '...Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the LORD for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest.

Leviticus 23:40 'And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days.

Leviticus 23:41 'You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month.

Leviticus 23:42 'You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths,

Leviticus 23:43 'that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.'"

Leviticus 23:44 So Moses declared to the children of Israel the feasts of the LORD.

During their wilderness wanderings, God was present with His people in the Tabernacle. The Feast of Tabernacles looks forward to the return of Jesus to again "tabernacle" with His people. Jesus will return at the end of the Great Tribulation to establish a one thousand year Kingdom. The Feast of Tabernacles will be celebrated during the Kingdom Age:

Zechariah 14:16 And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

Following these one thousand years the Lord will go on tabernacling with the redeemed of all ages:

Revelation 21:1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.

Revelation 21:2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Revelation 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.

Revelation 21:4 "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

Conclusion

People seem fascinated with knowing the future. Psychic hotlines and horoscopes are more popular than ever.

God has given you a calendar which tells the future. The calendar always begins with the Sabbath, when you cease from your own efforts to be saved, and instead trust Christ as your Passover Lamb.

Calendar observances can still be meaningful. Christians don't have a calendar per se... But we can develop a calendar over time.