LEVITICUS

Chapter 23

**The Lord said to Moses, 2 “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the Lord, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies.**

**23:2** *appointed feasts.* See Ex 23:14–17 and notes; 34:18–25; Nu 28–29; Dt 16:1–17. The parallel in Numbers (the fullest and closest to Leviticus) specifies in great detail the offerings to be made at each feast. See chart on “OT Feasts and Other Sacred Days”. (CSB)

God desired to meet His people at His altar (Ex 29:42–43; Nu 17:4); He fixed the times to meet with them there (v 44). (TLSB)

*holy convocations*. Gatherings for divine worship. (TLSB)

**Old Testament Feasts and other sacred days**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| NAME | OT REFERENCES | OT TIME | MODERN  EQUIVALENT | | DESCRIPTION | PURPOSE | NT REFERENCES |
| **Sabbath** | Ex 20:8–11; 31:12–17; Lev 23:3; Dt 5:12–15 | 7th day | Same | | Day of rest; no work | Rest for people and animals | Mt 12:1–14; 28:1; Lk 4:16; Jn 5:9; Ac 13:42; Col 2:16; Heb 4:1–11 |
| **Sabbath Year** | Ex 23:10–11; Lev 25:1–7 | 7th year | Same | | Year of rest; fallow fields | Rest for land |  |
| **Year of Jubilee** | Lev 25:8–55; 27:17–24; Nu 36:4 | 50th year | Same | | Canceled debts; liberation of slaves and indentured servants; land returned to original family owners | Help for poor; stabilize society |  |
| **Passover** | Ex 12:1–14; Lev 23:5;  Nu 9:1–14; 28:16;  Dt 16:1–3a, 4b–7 | 1st month (Abib) 14 | Mar.–Apr. | | Slaying and eating a lamb, together with bitter herbs and bread made without yeast, in every household | Remember Israel’s deliverance from Egypt | Mt 26:17; Mk 14:12–26; Jn 2:13; 11:55; 1Co 5:7;  Heb 11:28 |
| **Unleavened Bread** | Ex 12:15–20; 13:3–10; 23:15; 34:18;  Lev 23:6–8; Nu 28:17–25; Dt 16:3b, 4, 8 | 1st month (Abib) 15–21 | Mar.–Apr. | | Eating bread made without yeast; holding several assemblies; making designated offerings | Remember how the Lord brought the Israelites out of Egypt in haste | Mk 14:1, 12; Ac 12:3;  1 Co 5:6–8 |
| **Firstfruits** | Lev 23:9–14 | 1st month (Abib) 16 | Mar.–Apr. | | Presenting a sheaf of the first of the barley harvest as a wave offering; making a burnt offering and a grain offering | Recognize the Lord’s bounty in the land | Ro 8:23;  1 Co 15:20–23 |
| **Weeks (Pentecost)(Harvest)** | Ex 23:16a; 34:22a; Lev 23:15–21;  Nu 28:26–31; Dt 16:9–12 | 3rd month (Sivan) 6 | May–June | | A festival of joy; mandatory and voluntary offerings, including the firstfruits of the wheat harvest | Show joy and thankfulness for the Lord’s blessing of harvest | Ac 2:1–4; 20:16;  1Co 16:8 |
| **Trumpets (Later: Rosh Hashanah—New Year’s Day)** | Lev 16; 23:26–32  Nu 29:1–6 | 7th month (Tishri) 1 | Sept.–Oct. | | An assembly on a day of rest commemorated with trumpet blasts and sacrifices | Present Israel before the Lord for his favor |  |
| **Day of Atonement**  **(Yom Kippur)** | Lev 16; 23:26–32  Nu 29:7–11 | 7th month (Tishri) 10 | Sept.–Oct. | | A day of rest, fasting and sacrifices of atonement for priests and people and atonement for the tabernacle and altar | Cleanse priests and people from their sins and purify the Holy Place | Ro 3:24–26;  Heb 9:7; 10:3, 19–22 |
| **Tabernacles**  **(Booths) (Ingathering)** | Ex 23:16b; 34:22b; Lev 23:33–36a, 39–43;  Nu 29:12–34; Dt 16:13–15; Zec 14:16–19 | 7th month (Tishri) 15–21 | Sept.–Oct. | | A week of celebration for the harvest; living in booths and offering sacrifices | Memorialize the journey from Egypt to Canaan; give thanks for the productivity of Canaan | Jn 7:2, 37 |
| **Sacred Assembly** | Lev 23:36,b; Nu 29:35–38 | 7th month (Tishri) 22 | Sept.–Oct. | | A day of convocation, rest and offering sacrifices | Commemorate the closing of the cycle of feasts |  |
| **Purim** | Est 9:18–32 | 12th month (Adar) 14, 15 |  | | A day of joy and feasting and giving presents | Remind the Israelites of their national deliverance in the time of Esther |  |
| On Kislev 25 (mid-December) Hanukkah, the feast of dedication or festival of lights, commemorated the purification of the temple and altar in the Maccabean period (165/4 B.C.). This feast is mentioned in Jn 10:22. | | | | In addition, new moons were often special feast days (Nu 10:10; 1 Ch 23:31; Ezr 3:5; Ne 10:33; Ps. 81:3; Isa 1:13–14; 66:23; Hos 5:7; Am 8:5; Col 2:16). | | | |

***The Sabbath***

**3 “ ‘There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to the Lord.**

**23:3** *Sabbath.* See notes on Ex 16:23; 20:9–10. The Sabbath is associated with the annual feasts also in Ex 23:12. Two additional lambs were to be sacrificed as a burnt offering every weekly Sabbath (Nu 28:9–10). (CSB)

*solemn*. Marked or observed with religious rites. (TLSB)

**23:1–3** Ch 23 represents a liturgical calendar for the Israelites. All such festivals and Sabbaths prefigure Christ (Col 2:16–17). The life of Jesus Christ shapes the Christian liturgical calendar, granting rest not only for our weary bodies but also for our weary souls. • Lord, may we always see the life of Christ reflected in our service, since He comes near to us through His precious Word and Sacraments. Amen. (TLSB)

***The Passover and Unleavened Bread***

**4 “ ‘These are the Lord’s appointed feasts, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times: 5 The Lord’s Passover begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. 6 On the fifteenth day of that month the Lord’s Feast of Unleavened Bread begins; for seven days you must eat bread made without yeast. 7 On the first day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work. 8 For seven days present an offering made to the Lord by fire. And on the seventh day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work.’ ”**

**23:5** *Passover.* See notes on Ex 12:11, 14, 21. *first month.* See note on Ex 12:2. The Israelites had three systems of referring to months. In one, the months were simply numbered (as here and in v. 24). In another, the Canaanite names were used (Abib, Bul, etc.), of which only four are known. In the third system, the Babylonian names (Nisan, Adar, Tishri, Kislev, etc.) were used—in the exilic and postexilic books only—and are still used today. See chart on “Hebrew Calendar”. (CSB)

**Hebrew calendar and selected events**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| NUMBER of MONTH | | HEBREW NAME | | | MODERN EQUIVALENT | | BIBLICAL REFERENCES | | AGRICULTURE | | | FEASTS | |
| 1 | Sacred sequence begins | | 7 | |  | **Abib; Nisan** | | **MARCH–APRIL** | Ex 12:1; 13:4; 23:15; 34:18; Dt 16:1; Ne 2:1; Est 3:7 | | Spring (later) rains; barley and flax harvest begins | | Passover; Unleavened Bread; Firstfruits |
| 2 |  | | 8 | |  | **Ziv (Iyyar)** | | **APRIL–MAY** | 1 Ki 6:1, 37 | | Barley harvest; dry season begins | |  |
| 3 |  | | 9 | |  | **Sivan** | | **MAY–JUNE** | Est 8:9 | | Wheat harvest | | Pentecost (Weeks) |
| 4 |  | | 10 | |  | **(Tammuz)** | | **JUNE–JULY** |  | | Tending vines | |  |
| 5 |  | | 11 | |  | **(Ab)** | | **JULY–AUGUST** |  | | Ripening of grapes, figs and olives | |  |
| 6 |  | | 12 | |  | **Elul** | | **AUGUST–SEPTEMBER** | Ne 6:15 | | Processing grapes, figs and olives | |  |
| 7 |  | | 1 | | Civil sequence | **Ethanim (Tishri)** | | **SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER** | 1 Ki 8:2 | | Autumn (early) rains begin; plowing | | Trumpets; Atonement; Tabernacles (Booths) |
| 8 |  | | 2 | |  | **Bul** (Marcheshvan) | | **OCTOBER–NOVEMBER** | 1 Ki 6:38 | | Sowing of wheat and barley | |  |
| 9 |  | | 3 | |  | **Kislev** | | **NOVEMBER–DECEMBER** | Ne 1:1; Zec 7:1 | | Winter rains begin (snow in some areas) | | Hanukkah (“Dedication”) |
| 10 |  | | 4 | |  | **Tebeth** | | **DECEMBER–JANUARY** | Est 2:16 | |  | |  |
| 11 |  | | 5 | |  | **Shebat** | | **JANUARY–FEBRUARY** | Zec 1:7 | |  | |  |
| 12 |  | | 6 | |  | **Adar** | | **FEBRUARY–MARCH** | Ezr 6:15; Est 3:7, 13; 8:12; 9:1, 15, 17, 19, 21 | | Almond trees bloom; citrus fruit harvest | | Purim |
|  |  | |  | |  | **(Adar Sheni) Second Adar** | | This intercalary month was added about every three years so the lunar calendar would correspond to the solar year. |  | |  | |  |
|  | | | |  | | |  | | |  | | | |

**23:6** *Feast of Unleavened Bread.* See note on Ex 23:15. During the Feast the first sheaf of the barley harvest was brought (see vv. 10–11). (CSB)

Named from the prohibition of eating leavened bread. Cf Ex 12:8; 14–20. (TLSB)

**23:7** *ordinary work*. One’s occupation. (TLSB)

**23:4–8** Remembrance of God’s deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt was the most important component in their liturgical calendar. He made redemption the chief theme of their service. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, was slain on Good Friday as the Passover lambs were sacrificed. His sacrifice made redemption the chief theme of our worship too. • Blessed Redeemer, deliver us from all evil through Jesus Christ, our Paschal Lamb. Amen. (TLSB)

***Firstfruits***

**9 The Lord said to Moses, 10 “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. 11 He is to wave the sheaf before the Lord so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath. 12 On the day you wave the sheaf, you must sacrifice as a burnt offering to the Lord a lamb a year old without defect, 13 together with its grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil—an offering made to the Lord by fire, a pleasing aroma—and its drink offering of a quarter of a hin of wine. 14 You must not eat any bread, or roasted or new grain, until the very day you bring this offering to your God. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live.**

**23:10** *sheaf of the firstfruits*. Earliest sheaves from the barley harvest. (TLSB)

**23:11** *wave the sheaf*. Ritual action to thank God for His blessings. (TLSB)

**23:12–13** As the sheaves were waved, an unblemished lamb was presented as a burnt offering along with a grain offering of flour mixed with oil and wine. (TLSB)

**23:14** God forbade any eating of the new harvest until He received thanks. (TLSB)

**23:9–14** Ritual celebrations remind the Israelites of God’s blessing of the harvest. Today, the food that sustains us is likewise a gift from His kindness. At every meal, offer thanks to God for His generous gift of daily bread and blessing, from the One who has blessed us with the bread of life. • Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest, and let these gifts to us be blessed. Amen. (TLSB)

***Feast of Weeks***

**15 “ ‘From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. 16 Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the Lord. 17 From wherever you live, bring two loaves made of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour, baked with yeast, as a wave offering of firstfruits to the Lord. 18 Present with this bread seven male lambs, each a year old and without defect, one young bull and two rams. They will be a burnt offering to the Lord, together with their grain offerings and drink offerings—an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. 19 Then sacrifice one male goat for a sin offering and two lambs, each a year old, for a fellowship offering. 20 The priest is to wave the two lambs before the Lord as a wave offering, together with the bread of the firstfruits. They are a sacred offering to the Lord for the priest. 21 On that same day you are to proclaim a sacred assembly and do no regular work. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live. 22 “ ‘When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God.’ ”**

**23:15–16** The Feast of Weeks is celebrated 50 days after the barley harvest in May/June. (TLSB)

**23:15** *seven full weeks.* See note on Ex 23:16. (CSB)

**23:16** *fifty days.* The NT name for the Feast of Weeks was Pentecost (see Ac 2:1; 20:16; 1Co 16:8), meaning “fifty.” (CSB)

*new grain*. Beginning of the wheat harvest. (TLSB)

**23:20** *holy to the Lord* *for the priest*. Only the priests could eat from this sacrifice. (TLSB)

**23:21** God declares the day holy, like a Sabbath, so people may observe this feast. (TLSB)

*ordinary work*. One’s occupation. (TLSB)

**23:22** See note on 19:9–10. (CSB)

**23:15–22** God reminds His people that He is the source of all their blessings. He desires that they pause to thank Him during the wheat harvest. At Pentecost in the NT, God poured out the rich blessings of His Holy Spirit to begin a new harvest: God’s harvest of believers in Christ. • Lord, strengthen us with Your Holy Spirit, that we might gather a rich harvest of souls for Christ, so others may receive Your joy and rest. Amen. (TLSB)

***Feast of Trumpets***

**23 The Lord said to Moses, 24 “Say to the Israelites: ‘On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. 25 Do no regular work, but present an offering made to the Lord by fire.’ ”**

**23:24** *first day of the seventh month.* Today known as the Jewish New Year (*Rosh Hashanah*, “the beginning of the year”), but not so called in the Bible (the Hebrew expression is only used in Eze 40:1 in a date formula). *trumpet blasts.* Trumpets were blown on the first of every month (Ps 81:3). With no calendars available, the trumpets sounding across the land were an important signal of the beginning of the new season, the end of the agricultural year. See note on 16:29; see also chart on “Hebrew Calendar”. (CSB)

**23:24** *a memorial*. This holy day celebrated the Lord as King. (TLSB)

**23:23–25** God’s acclamation as Israel’s King ushers in the seventh month of the calendar. As Israel celebrated God’s reign through the old covenant, we celebrate His present reign in Christ, our gracious Lord. • Lord God, precious King, make us ever mindful of Your abundant mercies. Amen. (TLSB)

***Day of Atonement***

**26 The Lord said to Moses, 27 “The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present an offering made to the Lord by fire. 28 Do no work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the Lord your God. 29 Anyone who does not deny himself on that day must be cut off from his people. 30 I will destroy from among his people anyone who does any work on that day. 31 You shall do no work at all. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live. 32 It is a sabbath of rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. From the evening of the ninth day of the month until the following evening you are to observe your sabbath.”**

**23:27** *Day of Atonement.* For details see notes on 16:1–34. Aaron was to enter the Most Holy Place only once a year (16:29–34) on the day called by modern Jews *Yom Kippur*. The Biblical name, however, is the plural *Yom Hakkippurim* (as in this verse), derived from the Hebrew words *yom* (“day”) and *kipper* (“to atone”). The day was typological, foreshadowing the work of Christ, our high priest (see Heb 9:7; 13:11–12). *deny yourselves.* See note on 16:29, 31. (CSB)

**23:29** *cut off from his people.* See note on 7:20. (CSB)

**23:30** *I will destroy*. Reference to the fate of Nadab and Abihu. (TLSB)

**23:32** *evening to evening*. Days were calculated from evening to evening (cf Gn 1:5). (TLSB)

**23:26–32** The Day of Atonement was the great day of rest in the Sabbath month (23:32), with no work performed the entire day. Like Passover, the Day of Atonement commemorated God’s mercy and was an annual call to repentance and faith. Though our repentance should be daily, a season each year for repentance (e.g., Lent) helps us focus intentionally on our need for the Savior and the blessings He offers through the Church. • God of mercy, thank You for the atoning death of Your Son. Grant me sincere repentance and faith. Amen. (TLSB)

***Feast of Tabernacles***

**33 The Lord said to Moses, 34 “Say to the Israelites: ‘On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the Lord’s Feast of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days. 35 The first day is a sacred assembly; do no regular work. 36 For seven days present offerings made to the Lord by fire, and on the eighth day hold a sacred assembly and present an offering made to the Lord by fire. It is the closing assembly; do no regular work. 37 (“ ‘These are the Lord’s appointed feasts, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies for bringing offerings made to the Lord by fire—the burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings required for each day. 38 These offerings are in addition to those for the Lord’s Sabbaths and in addition to your gifts and whatever you have vowed and all the freewill offerings you give to the Lord.) 39 “ ‘So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the Lord for seven days; the first day is a day of rest, and the eighth day also is a day of rest. 40 On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. 41 Celebrate this as a festival to the Lord for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come; celebrate it in the seventh month. 42 Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths 43 so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.’ ” 44 So Moses announced to the Israelites the appointed feasts of the Lord.**

**23:34** *Feast of Tabernacles.* See notes on Ex 23:16; Jn 7:37–39. Tabernacles was the last of the three annual pilgrimage festivals (Ex 23:14–17; Dt 16:16). (CSB)

Commemorated Israel’s passing through the wilderness (v 43). (TLSB)

**23:37** *drink* *offerings*. Wine (Nu 15:5) poured around the altar (cf Ex 30:9). (TLSB)

**23:40** Known as the “four species”; trees from which branches were taken and used as part of the ceremonies in the Feast of Booths. (TLSB)

**23:42** *booths.* The Hebrew for this word is *Sukkot* and is also translated “Tabernacles” (as in v. 34), giving the feast its name. Even today, orthodox Jews construct small booths (see Ne 8:13–17) to remind them of the booths they lived in when God brought them out of Egypt at the time of the exodus (v. 43). (CSB)

Israelites commemorated their passage through the wilderness by living in crude huts made of tree branches. (TLSB)

**23:33–44** The Feast of Booths concluded the festive half of the liturgy that began at Passover and commemorated Israel’s safe travel on the way to the Promised Land. As you start each new journey, call on God’s blessing and commemorate His care. Walk with Him by faith. His peace will comfort you in all circumstances. • As You watched over Israel, dearest Jesus, and journeyed with the disciples, so also abide with me and watch over me until, by Your grace, I reach my eternal home in heaven. Amen. (TLSB)