

LEVITICUS

Chapter 23

Feasts of the LORD

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, These are the appointed feasts of the LORD that you shall proclaim as holy convocations; they are my appointed feasts.

23:2 *appointed feasts.* See 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” below. (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 REFERENC ES	OT TIME	MODERN EQUIVALE NT	DESCRIPTI ON	PURPOSE	NT REFERENC ES
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 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,	1st month (Abib) 14	Mar.–Apr.	Slaying and eating a lamb, together with bitter herbs	Remember Israel’s deliverance from Egypt	Mt 26:17; Mk 14:12–26; Jn 2:13; 11:55; 1Co 5:7; Heb 11:28

4b-7

and bread
made without
yeast, in
every
household

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	Cleanse priests and people from their sins and	Ro 3:24-26; Heb 9:7; 10:3, 19-22

				priests and people and atonement for the tabernacle and altar	purify the Holy Place
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
Sacred Assembly	Lev 23:36,b; Nu 29:35–38	7th month (Tishri) 22	Sept.–Oct.	A day of convocation, rest and offering sacrifices	Commemorat e 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 “Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the Lord in all your dwelling places.

23:3 *Sabbath.* 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

4 “These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them. 5 In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, [a] is the LORD’s Passover. 6 And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. 7 On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. 8 But you shall present a food offering to the LORD for seven days. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work.”

23:5 *first month.* 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–		Ripening of grapes,	

			AUGUST		figs and olives
6	12		Elul	AUGUST Ne 6:15 – SEPTEMBER	Processing grapes, figs and olives
7	1	Civil sequence	Ethanim (Tishri)	SEPTEMBER 1 Ki 8:2 – OCTOBER	Autumn (early) rains begin; plowing Trumpets; Atonement; Tabernacles (Booths)
8	2		Bul (Marcheshvan)	OCTOBER 1 Ki 6:38 – NOVEMBER	Sowing of wheat and barley
9	3		Kislev	NOVEMBER Ne 1:1; – DECEMBER Zec 7:1 BER	Winter rains begin (snow in some areas) Hanukkah (“Dedication”)
10	4		Tebeth	DECEMBER Est 2:16 – JANUARY Y	
11	5		Shebat	JANUARY Zec 1:7 – FEBRUARY RY	

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6

Adar **FEBRUARY** Ezr 6:15; Almond Purim
RY- Est 3:7, trees
MARCH 13; 8:12; bloom;
9:1, 15, citrus fruit
17, 19, 21 harvest

**(Adar
Sheni)
Second
Adar** This
intercalary
month was
added
about
every
three years
so the
lunar
calendar
would
correspon
d to the
solar year.

23:6 *Feast of Unleavened Bread.* 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)

The Feast of Firstfruits

9 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, **10** “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, **11** and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. **12** And on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering to the LORD. **13** And the grain offering with it shall be two tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, a food offering to the LORD with a pleasing aroma, and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, a fourth of a hin. **14** And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this

same day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

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)

The Feast of Weeks

15 “You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. 16 You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD. 17 You shall bring from your dwelling places two loaves of bread to be waved, made of two tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour, and they shall be baked with leaven, as firstfruits to the LORD. 18 And you shall present with the bread seven lambs a year old without blemish, and one bull from the herd and two rams. They shall be a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. 19 And you shall offer one male goat for a sin offering, and two male lambs a year old as a sacrifice of peace offerings. 20 And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the LORD for the priest. 21 And you shall make a proclamation on the same day. You shall hold a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work. It is a statute forever in all your dwelling places throughout your generations. 22 “And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: 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)

23:16 *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)

23:15–22 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 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 24 “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of solemn rest, a memorial proclaimed with blast of trumpets, a holy convocation. 25 You shall not do any ordinary work, and you shall present a food offering to the LORD.”

23:24 *in 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. (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)

The Day of Atonement

26 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 27 “Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves and present a food offering to the LORD. 28 And you shall not do any work on that very day, for it is a Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God. 29 For whoever is not afflicted on that very day shall be cut off from his people. 30 And whoever does any work on that very day, that person I will destroy from among his people. 31 You shall not do any work. It is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwelling places. 32 It shall be to you a Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict yourselves. On the ninth day of the month beginning at evening, from evening to evening shall you keep your Sabbath.”

23:27 *Day of Atonement.* 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). (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)

The Feast of Booths

33 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 34 “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, On the fifteenth day of this seventh month and for seven days is the Feast of Booths to the LORD. 35 On the first day shall be a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. 36 For seven days you shall

present food offerings to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall hold a holy convocation and present a food offering to the LORD. It is a solemn assembly; you shall not do any ordinary work. 37 “These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim as times of holy convocation, for presenting to the LORD food offerings, burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each on its proper day, 38 besides the LORD's Sabbaths and besides your gifts and besides all your vow offerings and besides all your freewill offerings, which you give to the LORD. 39 “On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD seven days. On the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest. 40 And you shall take on the first day the fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. 41 You shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It is a statute forever throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. 42 You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, 43 that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.” 44 Thus Moses declared to the people of Israel the appointed feasts of the LORD.

23:34 *Feast of Booths.* 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)