

# **CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian  
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

## **DHW BIBLE CLASS LESSON 13 LEVITICUS CHAPTER 23**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Leviticus 23 is a special chapter because it features the holidays in the nation Israel's annual calendar. These holidays were unlike the holidays we know today. Today, we spend our holidays either resting at home or shopping or taking a trip somewhere. Israel's holidays were completely different. First, these holidays were set by God. They were religious holidays. The Israelites were required to assemble together and worship God. The worship of the LORD their God was the heart of the celebration. This teaches that true renewal of spirit and body must have its focus on the worship of God.

These holidays were called the "feasts of the LORD" (23:2). There were seven feasts. The number seven is a special number in Scripture for it depicts perfection or completeness. At each of these feasts, the people were to assemble together and worship the LORD. It was a day of rest and they would refrain from work. These feasts were related to events that the nation Israel had experienced. Yet they also spoke concerning the Person and the Work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Four of the seven feasts were observed in the spring of the year. They were the feast

of the passover, the feast of unleavened bread, the feast of the firstfruits and the feast of weeks. The other three fell in the autumn of the year. They were the feast of trumpets, the feast of atonement and the feast of tabernacles.

### **OUTLINE**

- A. The Holy Sabbath (23:1-3).
  - 1. The commandment of the LORD to the children of Israel (vv.1, 2a).
  - 2. The feasts of the LORD were holy gatherings (v.2b).
  - 3. The sabbath (v.3).
    - a. A day of rest.
    - b. A holy gathering.
    - c. No work was done.
- B. The Feast of the Passover (23:4-5).
  - 1. The announcement of the feasts of the LORD (v.4a).
  - 2. The feasts were holy gatherings in their specified times (v.4b).
  - 3. It was celebrated on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month (v.5a).
  - 4. It was celebrated in the evening (v.5b).
- C. The Feast of the Unleavened Bread (23:6-8).
  - 1. It was celebrated on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the first month v.6a).
  - 2. The Israelites were commanded to eat only unleavened bread for seven days (vv.6c-8).
    - a. The first day the children of Israel must have a holy gathering (v.7a).

- b. They must not do manual work (v.7b).
  - c. They must offer a burnt offering for seven days (v.8a).
  - d. The 7<sup>th</sup> day was a holy gathering and no work was to be done (v.8b).
- D. The Feast of the Firstfruits (23:9-14).
1. The charge to the children of Israel (vv.9, 10).
  2. The commandment to offer a sheaf of the firstfruits of their harvest to the LORD (vv.10, 11).
  3. The commandment to offer a male lamb as a burnt offering (vv.12-14).
- E. The Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) (23:15-22).
1. The celebration of the feast of weeks was held 50 days after the feast of firstfruits (vv.15, 16).
  2. They must offer a new meat offering (vv.16b, 17).
  3. They must also offer a burnt offering, a sin offering and a peace offering (vv.18-20).
  4. That day would be proclaimed a holy gathering and no servile work would be done (v.21).
  5. The gleanings of the harvest fields must be left for the poor and the foreigner (v.22).
- F. The Feast of Trumpets (23:23-25).
1. The feast of trumpets would be celebrated on the first day of the seventh month (vv.23, 24a).
  2. It would be a holy gathering by the blowing of the trumpets and no servile work should be done (vv.24b, 25).
- G. The Day of Atonement (23:26-32).
1. The day of atonement was celebrated on the tenth day of the seventh month (vv.26, 27).
  2. There would be no work on that day (v.28).
  3. The people should afflict themselves, fasting which they would be "cut off" (v.29).
  4. Whoever did work on that day would be punished by death (v.30).
  5. On the ninth day of the month, they should observe the sabbath rest (v.32).
- H. The Feast of the Tabernacles (23:33-44).
1. The feast of the tabernacles was celebrated on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (vv.33-34, 39).
  2. On the first day they should hold a holy gathering and do no servile work (v.35).
  3. They must offer an offering made by fire for seven days (v.36a).
  4. On the eighth day, they should hold a holy gathering, offer an offering, and do no servile work (vv.36b-38).
  5. They should take on the first day the branches of palm trees and rejoice in the LORD (v.40).
  6. The injunction to keep the feast to the LORD (vv.41-44).

## COMMENTARY

### The Sabbath Rest

The feasts of the Lord were introduced by the reference to the Sabbath rest (vv.1-4). The Sabbath rest is the fourth commandment of the "Ten Words" (Exodus 20:8-11). Every week on the seventh day, the Israelites must keep the Sabbath holy unto God. On the Sabbath day, they were to congregate together and worship the LORD. They were not permitted to work. It was a rest day for them from their work. On their rest day, they were to assemble together and worship God. So right at the outset, God set a balance between work and rest.

In that respect, God announced the observance of the various feasts in which He required the children of Israel to gather together, refrain from working and worship Him at certain set times (v.4).

### The Feast of the Passover

The passover feast is very briefly referred to here. Details of this feast are given in Exodus 12-13. We know that whenever the children of Israel observed this feast, they would remember how the LORD God delivered them in a great and glorious way out of their bondage in Egypt. The passover feast occurred in the spring on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of their religious calendar in the month of Nisan.<sup>1</sup> This was around March/April. This feast commenced the religious year of the nation Israel.

### The Feast of the Unleavened Bread

The following day after they had observed the passover feast, they would begin the observance of the feast of the unleavened bread. The Hebrew word translated "feast" here is *hag* (v.6), which means, "pilgrimage."<sup>2</sup> Beginning from the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month, following the passover feast, they were not to partake of anything that had leaven. They must also remove all traces of leaven in their house. They would observe this feast for seven days. On the first and the last days of the feast, the children of Israel must gather together and worship God. On these two days they were not to do servile work. One new element introduced here was that the Israelites must make offerings to the LORD for the seven days (v.8). Leaven generally depicts sin or impurities in Scripture. The celebration of this feast served to remind Israel to keep holy unto God who had saved them from bondage in Egypt.

### The Feast of the Firstfruits

This was the feast of harvest. The people were to bring the firstfruits of their labour which they had sown in the fields. They were to present it to the LORD as a wave offering. It was celebrated on the second day of the Passover which was the morrow after the feast of the Unleavened Bread (16<sup>th</sup> of Nisan). This wave offering was to be accompanied by a burnt offering of a lamb without blemish, a meat offering and a drink offering (v.13). This feast marked the beginning of the grain harvest in Israel.

### The Feast of Weeks

Seven sabbaths after the feast of the firstfruits (v.15) would be the fourth feast. This feast was the feast of weeks (Exodus 34:22; in Hebrew *hag*

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<sup>1</sup> The month was called "Abib" (Exodus 23:15, 16) before the Captivity. After the Captivity the month was called "Nisan" (Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary, general editor, Ronald F. Youngblood).

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<sup>2</sup> Compare the Muslims who make their annual pilgrimage to Mecca which they call *haj*.

*hashavout*). The children of Israel would offer a wave offering before the LORD. This offering was to be accompanied by a burnt offering of seven lambs, which were one year old & without blemish, and one young bullock, and two rams. It would be a sweet savour, an offering of thanksgiving to the LORD. After that they must also sacrifice a young goat for a sin offering and two lambs for a peace offering. The priest would present another wave offering before the LORD accompanying these offerings (vv.19, 20). This feast marked the beginning of the summer wheat harvest, just as the feast of the fruitfruits marked the beginning of the spring barley harvest.<sup>3</sup> In the New Testament, it is called the feast of pentecost (Greek, meaning 50). Almost 1,500 years later, Luke recorded the celebration of this feast in Jerusalem (Acts 2). Many diaspora Jews make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate this feast.

### **The Feast of Trumpets**

Not much was mentioned about the feast of trumpets here. On the first day of the seventh month (around September / October) a sabbath rest would be called. This was the first feast celebrated in the fall (autumn) of the year. There would be a blowing of the trumpets. The people would gather together to offer a burnt offering to the LORD (vv.24, 25). Its actual celebration was recorded once in the Bible (Ezra 3:1-6).<sup>4</sup>

### **The Day of Atonement**

On the tenth day of the seventh month, that is, the same month after celebrating the feast of trumpets, the children of Israel were to observe a day of atonement, (Hebrew *Yom Kippur*). “Yom” means “day” and “kippur” from “kaphar” meaning “to cover.” The children of Israel were commanded to “afflict” their souls. This meant that they were to engage in fasting and penitential exercises.<sup>5</sup> The details of the observance are given in chapter 16. On this special day, the high priest was allowed to enter into the most holy place or the Holy of Holies to stand before the presence of God’s glory. It was the day when all their unintentional sins and sins of omission were atoned for and forgiven.

### **The Feast of Tabernacles**

This was the seventh and the greatest of all the feasts because it was celebrated for seven days (v.34). It was observed on the 15th of the seventh month. The children of Israel would assemble together on the first day. They were not to do any work. For each of the seven days, they were to make an offering to the Lord by fire. And on the eighth day, they would assemble again to make a burnt offering. In those seven days, they were to erect “booths” or tents made with branches of trees (vv.40-42). This feast reminded the children of Israel of their sojourn in the wilderness where they had lived in tents. It also reminded them of God’s provision and sustenance. The feast was celebrated with great joy. The feast spoke of not only God’s past provisions and protection for them but also promises of God’s present goodness and provision with the completion of the

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<sup>3</sup> Howard & Rosenthal, *The Feasts of the LORD* (Florida, Orlando: Zion Hope Inc. Press), 89-90.

<sup>4</sup> Modern Jews celebrate this feast as Rosh Hashanah, which means “Head of the Year” (Howard & Rosenthal, 103).

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<sup>5</sup> Wenham, 305.

harvest.<sup>6</sup> Hence another name for this feast is called the feast of the ingathering (Exodus 23:16).

### PRACTICAL VALUE

These were the seven festival days of the nation of Israel. The Israelites still observe these feast days. The three great festival days are:

- The Passover. They are reminded of the great deliverance from bondage in Egypt.
- The feast of weeks or Pentecost. When they present their firstfruits before the LORD, they are reminded of God's provisions for all their needs.
- The final feast of tabernacles or Ingathering. They are reminded of God's promises of His continued abundant blessings for the present and future.

The Christian Church today celebrates three of these seven feasts: Passover/Good Friday; Unleavened Bread/Easter and Weeks/Pentecost. The dates do not coincide due to the differences in the calculation of the calendar.<sup>7</sup>

More significant is the fact that the feasts of the LORD portray the Lord Jesus Christ in His redemptive work and God's eternal plan. The feast of the passover speaks to us of the redemptive work of Christ on the cross. He died as the true Lamb of God that takes away our sins. He redeems us from the bondage of sin and Satan. The feast of the unleavened bread speaks of His once-and-for-all work in which all our

sins are forgiven. There is nothing we can add to save ourselves. His redemptive work is perfect and complete. The feast of firstfruits speaks of His Resurrection from the dead. He is the firstfruits (1Corinthians 15:23). His resurrection ensures our resurrection too! The feast of weeks speaks of the calling of the Church. The gospel of salvation is offered to the Gentiles. This took place at Pentecost. The feast of trumpets speaks of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in the air to take His church to be with Him (1 Thessalonians 4). The feast of atonement speaks of the atoning grace of God upon the Israelites who have rejected Him. Israel's eyes will be open and Israel will acknowledge that Jesus of Nazareth is really their Messiah and Saviour. They will repent. Atonement has been made for them. This speaks of the repentance and return of Israel to God. The feast of tabernacles speaks of Christ's bodily and visible return to earth to establish His kingdom on earth. He will reign and bless all His people.

Even so come Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> Howard & Rosenthal, 135.

<sup>7</sup> Wenham, 306.

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Daily Readings**

**Monday:** Leviticus 23:1-8; Matthew 12:1-13; John 1:29; 1Corinthians 5:7-8.

**Tuesday:** Leviticus 23:9-14; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23.

**Wednesday:** Leviticus 23:15-22; Isaiah 59:20-21; Acts 2:1-4.

**Thursday:** Leviticus 23:23-25; Ezra 3:1-6; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; Revelation 6:17.

**Friday:** Leviticus 23:26-44; Hebrews 9:11-14, 24-28; Matthew 13:36-43; Revelation 14:15.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Whose feasts were these?

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2. What must the children of Israel observe in a "holy convocation"?

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3. What was the first annual feast of the LORD? When was it celebrated? What event did this remind the children of Israel of?

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4. What present day event is equivalent to the feast of the passover?

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5. What did the feast of firstfruits remind the children of Israel of?

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6. What is the parallel event in the Christian calendar vis-à-vis the feast of firstfruits?

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7. What future event did the feast of the firstfruits prophesy? Who is the firstfruits?

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8. How many days did the children of Israel have to count from the feast of firstfruits before they celebrate the feast of weeks?

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9. What is another name for the feast of weeks? When was it fulfilled?

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10. What did the feast of weeks mark for the Israelites?

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11. How does it apply to the church in the present age?

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12. What did the feast of trumpets mean to Israel?

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13. How does it apply to the Christian Church?

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**14.** What was the purpose of the feast of atonement?

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**15.** In view of the fact that the feast of the tabernacles was the final and last feast, what truths could be taught from it?

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