

SLIDE: Leviticus 23: 1-44

We've heard about these festivals in the book I read earlier. If you're reading along, you can go to Leviticus – third book of the Bible – and follow along. We won't read all of the details of each festival, but we'll hear the rhythm and purpose of each one, including their connection to Christ.

The Appointed Festivals

23 The LORD said to Moses, ²“Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. These are the LORD’s appointed festivals, which you are to proclaim as official days for holy assembly.

³“You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of complete rest, an official day for holy assembly. It is the LORD’s Sabbath day, and it must be observed wherever you live.

⁴“In addition to the Sabbath, these are the LORD’s appointed festivals, the official days for holy assembly that are to be celebrated at their proper times each year.

We'll learn more specifics about Sabbath in September, but here's a picture that shows the feasts in order:

SLIDE: Seven Feasts of the Lord

SLIDE: Pesach/Passover & Unleavened Bread

Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread

⁵“The LORD’s Passover begins at sundown on the fourteenth day of the first month.^[a] ⁶ On the next day, the fifteenth day of the month, you must begin celebrating the Festival of Unleavened Bread. This festival to the LORD continues for seven days, and during that time the bread you eat must be made without yeast. ⁷ On the first day of the festival, all the people must stop

their ordinary work and observe an official day for holy assembly. ⁸ For seven days you must present special gifts to the LORD. On the seventh day the people must again stop all their ordinary work to observe an official day for holy assembly.”

This was an agricultural festival during the barley harvest and a time when Jewish men would travel to Jerusalem – a pilgrimage. It was a time to remember God’s saving work in the Exodus – when the Israelites were told to put the blood of a lamb on their doors to be saved as they were led to freedom from slavery in Egypt and God began to form them as a holy nation. Unleavened bread was eaten as a reminder that the Israelites had to hurry to leave without waiting for their bread to rise. Remember that Jesus shared the Passover meal with his friends before he was crucified, and he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

SLIDE: Shavout/First Fruits

Celebration of First Harvest/First Fruits

⁹ Then the LORD said to Moses, ¹⁰ “Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. When you enter the land I am giving you and you harvest its first crops, bring the priest a bundle of grain from the first cutting of your grain harvest...”

There’s more that was offered, including a lamb. This festival was celebrated at the beginning of the harvest. Giving the first fruit of the crop was a reminder that God is the Giver of the whole harvest. It was a celebration of God’s abundance – and even new life. There’s a connection to the celebration of Easter as we consider Jesus’ resurrection and new life he offers.

SLIDE: Shavout/Weeks/Pentecost

The Festival of Harvest

¹⁵ “From the day after the Sabbath—the day you bring the bundle of grain to be lifted up as a special offering—count off seven full weeks. ¹⁶ Keep counting until the day after the seventh Sabbath, fifty days later. Then present an offering of new grain to the LORD. ¹⁷ From wherever you live, bring two loaves of bread to be lifted up before the LORD as a special offering...

²² “When you harvest the crops of your land, do not harvest the grain along the edges of your fields, and do not pick up what the harvesters drop. Leave it for the poor and the foreigners living among you. I am the LORD your God.”

Just like the festival of the first harvest, there's more that was offered, including animals. And this was another time for Jewish men to go to Jerusalem and rejoice over the full harvest at the end of the spring season. And you might notice that this happens after a week of weeks – 50 days after the harvest begins. The Feast of Weeks is what the people were celebrating when the day of Pentecost came in Acts 2 and the Holy Spirit came upon the people – a spiritual harvest of sorts. And don't miss the command from God to leave the edges of the field unharvested for those in need. God is concerned for the most vulnerable – the poor and those from outside the community.

SLIDE: Rosh Hashanah/Trumpets

The Festival of Trumpets

²³ The LORD said to Moses, ²⁴ “Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. On the first day of the appointed month in early autumn,^[e] you are to observe a day of complete rest. It will be an official day for holy assembly, a day commemorated with loud blasts of a trumpet. ²⁵ You must do no ordinary work on that day. Instead, you are to present special gifts to the LORD.”

Blowing the trumpet was a call to gather and remember God's victory. This was like New Year's Day for the Israelites – a time of celebration and praise. We know it called Rosh Hashanah.

SLIDE: Yom Kippur/Atonement

The Day of Atonement

²⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, ²⁷ “Be careful to celebrate the Day of Atonement on the tenth day of that same month—nine days after the Festival of Trumpets.^[f] You must observe it as an official day for holy assembly, a day to deny yourselves^[g] and present special gifts to the LORD. ²⁸ Do no work during that entire day because it is the Day of Atonement, when offerings of purification are made for you, making you right with^[h] the LORD your God...

This was a day of fasting, self-examination, confession, repentance, and forgiveness – and being made right with God. And God is clear that this day is essential for the Israelites, even threatening to cut them off if they don't observe it. Today we know it as Yom Kippur. We see a connection to our season of Lent when we turn to God in prayer and repentance, trusting in God's forgiveness through Christ's sacrifice.

SLIDE: Sukkot/Tabernacles/Booths/Shelters

The Festival of Shelters

³⁹ “Remember that this seven-day festival to the LORD—the Festival of Shelters—begins on the fifteenth day of the appointed month,^[k] after you have harvested all the produce of the land. The first day and the eighth day of the festival will be days of complete rest. ⁴⁰ On the first day gather branches from magnificent trees^[l]—palm fronds, boughs from leafy trees, and willows that grow by the streams. Then celebrate with joy before the LORD your God

for seven days. ⁴¹ You must observe this festival to the LORD for seven days every year. This is a permanent law for you, and it must be observed in the appointed month^[m] from generation to generation. ⁴² For seven days you must live outside in little shelters. All native-born Israelites must live in shelters. ⁴³ This will remind each new generation of Israelites that I made their ancestors live in shelters when I rescued them from the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.”

This is third festival when Jewish men would come to Jerusalem. It was a time to remember God's shelter and provision after the Exodus as the Israelites had been in the wilderness making their way to the Promised Land. It was the end of the fall harvest when the fruits of their labor could be enjoyed and a time give thanks to God.

SLIDE: Title

⁴⁴ So Moses gave the Israelites these instructions regarding the annual festivals of the LORD.

The Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God.**