

# Leviticus Chapter 23

## The Appointed Festivals

There is some discussion as to how these festivals are to be numbered. It seems best to see the chapter as first discussing the weekly Sabbath and then outlining seven festivals which were mandatory for Israel – four were in the Spring, three were in the Fall. Three of those (Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Tabernacles) required a gathering of all the men of Israel.



[Trumpet picture from [www.postersfromtheheart.com](http://www.postersfromtheheart.com).]

[In addition to these, the Jewish community today has added some festivals not in the Old Testament. Most noteworthy are Hanukkah and Purim. Hanukkah, celebrated in November-December, commemorates the rededication of the Temple after the victorious revolt of the Maccabees in the second century BC (1 Maccabees 4:56-59). Purim, celebrated in February-March, commemorates the deliverance of the Jews from the Persian Empire as recorded in the book of Esther (Esther 9:18-32).]

### Leviticus 23:1-4 The Sabbath Day

Three things should be notice about the weekly Sabbath Day:

1. It was on *the seventh day*, Saturday not Sunday (on our calendar).
2. There was to be *complete rest ... you shall not do any work*.
3. It is to be carried out *in all of your dwellings*, not at the Temple or in synagogues.

### The Spring Festivals – Leviticus 23:5-22

#### Leviticus 23:5 The First Festival – Passover



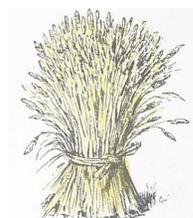
The Passover is listed with little explanation. It is discussed in detail in Exodus 12:1-14. It was to take place at twilight on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month, Nisan (March-April). Its purpose was to remember the blood of the Passover lamb that allowed the angel of death to pass over their home as they left their bondage in Egypt.

#### Leviticus 23:6-8 The Second Festival – Unleavened Bread

For 14 days, beginning the morning after Passover, from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> of Nisan, they were to eat unleavened bread and present a burnt offering to the LORD. The first and last days are also a Sabbath of complete rest. The purpose was to remember their hasty flight from Egypt. This was the first festival of the year where all the men were to gather together. This is outlined in more detail in Exodus 12:15-20.

#### Leviticus 23:9-14 The Third Festival – First Fruits

This festival was to be celebrated after they entered the land. The ceremony consisted of bringing a sheaf of grain, having the priest wave it before the LORD, and offering a specified grain offering and a sacrifice of *a male lamb one year old without defect*. They were not to eat of the produce of the land until they



accomplished this festival.

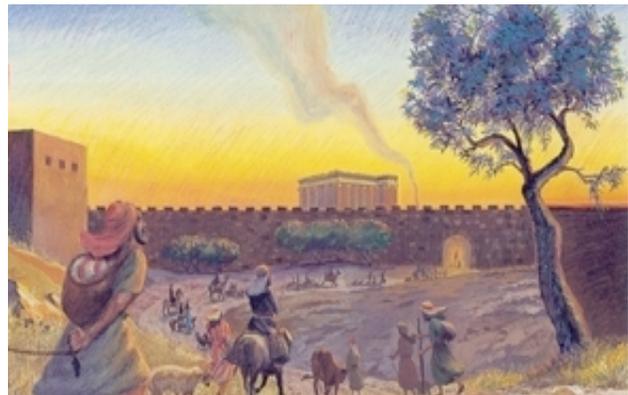
The First Fruits Festival always occurred during the week of the Festival of Unleavened Bread. It is also the only Jewish festival which was always on Sunday. Passover, and the beginning and end of the week of Unleavened Bread, fall on different days of the week in different years. But First Fruits always fell on Sunday, because it is always *on the day after the Sabbath*. This is the only festival day besides the Sabbath Day (Saturday) which always falls on the same day of the week (Sunday). It is also the only festival ignored by the Jewish community today.

When Jesus was crucified, He died on Passover, the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. The next day was Saturday, the 15<sup>th</sup> (the Sabbath), the third day, when He rose from the dead, was Sunday the 16<sup>th</sup>. But since, during that particular month, Passover was on Friday, Jesus rose from the dead on the day of the Festival of First Fruits.

### **Leviticus 23:15-22 The Fourth Festival – Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks**

This was a complicated festival involving the presentation of two loaves of leavened bread and thirteen different animal sacrifices. Besides that, the day was to be a Sabbath of complete rest.

Pentecost was to take place 50 days after the previously mentioned Festival of First Fruits. This was the time of the summer wheat harvest. The Old Testament designation “Feast of Weeks” became “Pentecost” in the New Testament because it came 50 days after the Sunday of First Fruits. The Old Testament does not connect this festival to any occasion in Israel’s history. [Jewish tradition, however, connects it to the day Moses received the Law on Mount Sinai.] This was the second festival of the year where all the men were required to gather together.



[Picture from [www.worldwithoutend.info](http://www.worldwithoutend.info).]

### **The Fall Festivals – Leviticus 23:23-44**

#### **Leviticus 23:23-25 The Fifth Festival – The Blowing of Trumpets**



This is the first of three festivals, all of which take place during the month of Tishri (September-October). This one is on the first of the month. It was a day for rest and blowing of trumpets. Silver trumpets were blown at the beginning of each month (Numbers 10:1, 10), but this was a whole day of blowing trumpets. Many suggest this was to anticipate the upcoming Day of Atonement. [This became the beginning of the Jewish New Year in the civil calendar accepted during postexilic times, called Rosh Hashanah.]

#### **Leviticus 23:26-32 The Sixth Festival – The Day of Atonement**

The details of this festival were discussed in chapter 16. It was to occur on the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month. The emphasis in chapter 23 is on how an ordinary Israelite was to observe the day. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month, they were to bring a burnt offering and keep the day as a complete Sabbath rest. It is interesting that every verse describing this day has instructions of severe warnings about keeping or

violating the day as a Sabbath rest. [Today the Jewish community calls it Yom Kippur, which is simply Hebrew for “Day of Atonement.”]



**Leviticus 23:33-43 The Seventh Festival – The Feast of Tabernacles**

Verse 42 says: *You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel.* This was also called the Festival of Booths or Ingathering, and it was to take place between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 22<sup>nd</sup> of the month Tishri. It functioned as an agricultural thanksgiving day and a remembrance of God’s protection during the wilderness wanderings. There were elaborate ceremonies to be carried out, and a Sabbath day at the beginning and end. This is the third and final time during the year that all the men were to

gather together.

THOUGHTS AND APPLICATIONS

The reason we do not keep the Jewish festivals is because:

1. They are part of the Law of Moses, which ended at the Cross of Christ (Romans 10:4).
2. They are connected to the Land of Israel. They were not even designed for the Israelites wandering in the wilderness. The Law cannot be separated from the Land.
3. Most important, Jesus Christ fulfilled all the reasons for the festivals.

The following table comes from the “MacArthur Study Bible” (notes on Leviticus 23, p.186):

**The Feasts (Leviticus 23)**

Passover (March/April)  
Unleavened Bread (March/April)  
Firstfruits (March/April)  
Pentecost (May/June)  
Trumpets (September/October)  
Atonement (September/October)  
Tabernacles (September/October)

**Christ’s Fulfillment**

Death of Christ (1 Corinthians 5:7)  
Sinlessness of Christ (1 Corinthians 5:8)  
Resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:23)  
Outpouring of Spirit of Christ (Acts 1:5; 2:4)  
Israel’s Regathering by Christ (Matthew 24:31)  
Substitutionary Sacrifice by Christ (Romans 11:26)  
Rest and Reunion with Christ (Zechariah 14:16-19)

There are no festivals commanded or recommended for the church. Most Christians recognize two ordinances: Baptism and Communion (sometimes called the Eucharist or the Lord’s Supper). Communion was initiated by Christ at His last Passover meal with the 12. But the Communion of the church is not a continuation of Passover. Passover ended with Christ. What Jesus inaugurated was a meal where there was eating of bread and drinking of wine which remembered His body and blood. Paul wrote:

*In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes (1 Corinthians 11:25-26).*