

# Feasts of the Lord & Sabbath

## The Sections of the Feasts

Leviticus 23 can be divided as follows below. Verses 1-2, 4 and 44 are instructions to Moses and/or summary statements and are not included.

<i>Leviticus 23</i>	Feast	Date	Theme
v.3	The Sabbath	<i>Every seventh day of every week</i>	Rest
v.5	Passover	<i>First month: 14 Nisan</i>	Redemption
vv.6-8	Unleavened Bread	<i>First month: 15-21 Nisan</i>	Righteousness
vv.9-14	Firstfruits	<i>First month (morning after the Sabbath)</i>	Resurrection
vv.15-22	Pentecost (Weeks)	<i>Third month: 50 days after Firstfruits</i>	Residence
vv.23-25	Trumpets	<i>Seventh month: 1 Tishri</i>	Regathering
vv.26-32	Day of Atonement	<i>Seventh month: 10 Tishri</i>	Repentance
vv.33-43	Tabernacles (Ingathering)	<i>Seventh month: 15 Tishri</i>	Rejoicing

The chapter might be differently divided by important re-occurring phrases:

- 'I am the Lord your God' occurs twice in the chapter (vv.22, 43). This divides the feasts into two groups; *spring* and *autumn* feasts. Four *spring* feasts have been fulfilled and are associated with **Christianity**. *Autumn* feasts are yet to be fulfilled and are associated with the nation of **Israel**. We should not be surprised at the dividing of seven into four and three. This is often the case throughout Scripture. For example, the seven parables of Matthew 13 can be divided into four which were public and three which were private. The first four describe the kingdom in its outward aspect, in a character visible to the world. The last three present the kingdom in a way that only those taught of God can understand. Likewise the seven churches. The first three present stages in the history of the professing church that have passed away. The last four describe conditions that continue to the end. This explains the omission of all references to the coming of the Lord in the first three letters and the emphasis on this in the last four.
- 'And the Lord spake to Moses' occurs five times in the chapter (vv.1, 9, 23, 26, 33). This phrase indicates fresh or new revelation from God and is a key to understanding the entire book of Leviticus (36 references throughout). In fact, the title of the book Leviticus (in Hebrew) is *vayikra* meaning 'He calls' or 'the Lord spake'. The book is comprised (over 90%) of the words of God. This division closely connects Passover and Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits and Pentecost; they have a special relationship. This division gives us the *moral* setting of the feasts; the four and three division is the *dispensational* setting.

Note. The interval of four months between the *spring* and *autumn* feasts was silent. No fresh call from Jehovah to his people was heard. This is instructive as it foreshadows the present age of the Spirit's residence; God has spoken in His Son and will not speak again until the tribulation period.

## The Significance of the Feasts

The feasts were **historical and prophetic**. Whilst, for Israel, each feast was a memorial of past events (historical) they were also foreshadowings of greater events (prophetic). For example, the Passover remembers God's deliverance of His people from Egypt as well as picturing the greater redemption accomplished at Calvary by the Lamb of God. The feast of Tabernacles remembers the nation dwelling in tents with Jehovah (tabernacle) during the wilderness years, a picture of coming millennial glory when every man shall dwell under his vine or fig tree and under God's protective tabernacle (Micah 4.4, Revelation 7.15 JND). The *prophetic* significance will be emphasised throughout these studies.

There was also an **agricultural and sacrificial** significance. Each feast was related to a particular harvest season and was a token of God's material goodness (Acts 14.17). The bringing of sacrifices (Numbers 28-29) was also central to each.

But, there were also a large number of **practical** lessons to be learned from these feasts:

- **Faith**. All the males 20 years and older (often accompanied by wives, women and children) were to appear before the Lord three times a year. This left their homes and land exposed to enemy attack, yet God had promised this would not be the case. *Exodus 34.24: For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year.* Gathering to the Lord in Jerusalem was therefore a test of **faith**. What a challenge this is! To place business, family

and domestic worries upon the Lord and not bring them to or allow them to prevent us from gathering with the Lord's people. Those who seek Him first shall be blessed (Matthew 6.33).

- **Form.** The feasts were located at times when it would be easier to travel (largely warm months) and suitable agriculturally. In addition, the feasts were so spaced that one could be at Jerusalem for all seven feasts and yet only travel up three times a year. God has no desire to make spiritual life burdensome! If we live for ourselves or seek to serve Him in our own strength it will be tough. His yoke fits us perfectly (Matthew 11.28-30).
- **Fellowship.** It was important for God's people from all over Israel to gather together in one place (Jeremiah 3.17) and share their experiences of God's goodness. This helped to maintain *unity*. For example, at Passover they would celebrate their common redemption and at Pentecost their common covenant relationship (giving of the law). Gathering with God's people is important for fellowship and developing a common bond of unity.
- **Fidelity.** At each feast God's people would rehearse with each other, in particular younger family members, the reasons for the seasons. Note Exodus 13.14; Deuteronomy 6.20-25; 26.1-11. This was an important means of teaching and therefore continued witness and testimony to the truth of God. Likewise, it is important for God's people (collectively and as families) to rehearse the truth that supports our practice.

Perhaps the greatest encouragement of all is this: *If God can organise the course of time (as foreshadowed in the seven feasts), you can trust Him in every detail of life.*

### **The Sabbath (v.3)**

It is significant that the feasts begin with reference to the Sabbath. The word 'Sabbath' (*Shabbat*) simply means to 'desist', 'cease' or 'rest' and occurs 108 times in the OT. The Sabbath was observed on the seventh day of the week, i.e. Saturday, and is the only named day in the Hebrew tongue. God's commandment to observe the Sabbath was given in Exodus 20.8-11 to grant His people rest from the slavery of Egypt. God (as Redeemer) laid claim to their time.

The Sabbath **Picture** and **Person**: The Sabbath principle was established in creation. *Genesis 2.2: And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.* This rest was not fatigue, but rather satisfaction and delight in a work well done. By resting at the end of the week, God demonstrated that His ultimate goal was to bring mankind into eternal spiritual rest. There is no mention of the evening or morning on this day; it was God's desire that this rest might *abide*. However, sin disturbed God's rest. Ever since God has been working to provide His eternal rest – which rest is found in a Person (John 5.17). Christ is the Great Rest Giver (Matthew 11.28). This is why the feasts also end with a Sabbath (Leviticus 23.39). This is the *eternal* Sabbath of rest (the eighth day) in which even creation will share (Romans 8.21). *Leckie: God's creation rest was disturbed by the entry of sin which was dealt with at Calvary. An eternal rest now awaits for God and his people as a result. This rest shall never be disturbed, when God shall rest eternally in his love, where everything is eternally suited to God's own nature. There will be no possibility of sin, wicked men or Satan entering/intruding. God shall rest eternally with His people.*

The Sabbath **Principle**: Christians today are not called upon to keep the Sabbath; neither has the Sabbath been transferred to the Lord's Day. It was given as a commandment to the nation of Israel only. The Jewish Sabbath was a shadow which pointed forward to a Person. Christ is the substance of the shadow and the day is fulfilled in Him (Colossians 2.16-17). There is, however, a Sabbath principle to which we should all adhere. As our Redeemer, God expects us to acknowledge Him in the way we use our time. Are we giving God PRIORITY in our personal, daily programmes? God has brought us out of the slavery of seven days of work! The rest of life is refilled and refuelled through observance of this principle.

The Sabbath **Purpose**: A *sign* to demonstrate the people's **separation** to God (Exodus 31.13). It was a day which brought *physical* (Exodus 23.12) and *spiritual refreshment* – a day of delight *in* and worship of God as Creator and Redeemer. Setting aside time for God is an act of worship. The observance of the Sabbath brought great **joy** and *prosperity* (Isaiah 58.13-14). On the Sabbath offerings were doubled foreshadowing a greater **appreciation** of Christ in eternity (Numbers 28.9-10). All these blessings and more are ours in the exercise of the Sabbath principle.