

Study 0049

Scripture Text: *Leviticus 23:1-44*

So far, we have described the sanctuary, the priesthood, and the sacrificial offerings associated with worship in the Old Covenant Era. In this study, we shall be looking at the feasts and festivals associated with the worship of God in the Old Covenant Era. We shall be looking at the significance of these feasts and festivals.

The Old Covenant Era: Feasts and Festivals

The feasts of the Old Covenant Era were activities or events which marked times of celebration, holy convocation, and solemn gathering of God's people in honour and appreciation of God's dealings and doings for them. It was not times of revelries when they got lost in immorality and depravities of all sorts as is common in many of the so called holy events of modern society. These feasts were times when the people of Israel remembered what God had done for them, and they were also times and seasons ordained by God for His people to rest and be refreshed in Him. There were seven annual feasts, a weekly Sabbath and the year of Jubilee, which occurred once in fifty years. The seven annual feasts were, the LORD's Passover, the feast of Unleavened Bread, First fruits, Weeks (or Harvest), Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and, Tabernacles. These annual feasts lasted for one, seven, or eight (in one case) days, and totalled twenty days in all. Three of them were mandatory times when all the males of Israel had to appear before God (**Deuteronomy 16:1-17**); and these were, the Feast of Unleavened Bread (which began from the LORD's Passover), the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles; and they must not appear before God empty handed (**1 Samuel 1:1-5**)! Let us now take a closer look at these feasts:

The LORD's Passover (**Leviticus 23:5; Exodus 12:1—13:16**) was a one-day celebration, which commemorated the exodus of God's people from Egypt. It was to celebrate the day God passed over the first born sons of the Israelites but He killed the first born sons of the Egyptians; an act which led to the deliverance of the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt. It was celebrated on the fourteenth day of the first month of the Israelite year.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread (**Leviticus 23:6-8**) was a seven-day event. The celebration began a day after the Passover, that is, the fifteenth day of the first month. It was a period during which the children of Israel ate only unleavened bread. It was a further reminder of the exodus from Egypt, and the haste with which they had to leave, in which they ate bread without yeast (as they did not have to wait for the yeast to rise). The non-inclusion of yeast also represented the absence of sin from the life that they were being released into (sin being the reason for bondage and hardship). Normal work was forbidden from being done on the first and seventh days of this feast, as they were days when a holy convocation (or assembly) was called.

The Feast of First Fruit (**Leviticus 23:9-14**) was a one-day event, and it occurred at the beginning of the harvest of the first crops also known as the barley harvest. A sheaf of the first fruit or first harvest was brought to the priest, who presented it to the Lord, by waving it before God, along with a burnt offering and meal offering. The first fruit had to be presented to God before anyone could eat of the fruit of the harvest, and it spoke of the people's acknowledgement and appreciation of God's provision (**Proverbs 3:9-10**).

The Feast of Weeks or Harvest (**Leviticus 23:15-21**) was a one-day event, and occurred fifty days from the first day after the Sabbath when the first fruit was presented unto God. It was the full celebration of the harvest, and was usually celebrated at the end of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest. Bread, baked from the harvest was presented to God along with burnt, meal, peace, and sin offerings. It was a time when the people

thanked and praised God for a bountiful harvest and rejoiced in all that God had done for them.

The Feast of the Trumpets (Leviticus 23:23-25) was a one-day event, which occurred on the first day of the seventh month of the Israelite year. It was a day when trumpets were blown to mark the beginning of the civil year in Israel, and it was also a day of holy convocation of the people when no work was to be done (Numbers 29:1-6). The blowing of trumpets on this day was a call to remind the people of God to be prepared for the assemblies that would take place later in the month. There was offered, a burnt, meal, and sin offerings. Reference to the blowing of the trumpets, was made in Joel 2:1.

The Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:26-32; Numbers 29:8-11) was a one-day event and occurred on the tenth day of the seventh month of the Israelite year. It was a day in which the people were told to afflict their souls before God (a day of fasting) and to do no ordinary work. It was a day of a holy convocation. It was the only day when the high priest went into the most holy place to atone for his and his household sins, and the sins of the nation (Leviticus 16:2-34).

The Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:33-44; Numbers 29:12-40) was the only eight-day event and began on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. On the first day of this feast (the fifteenth day of the seventh month) a holy convocation and a solemn assembly was called and no ordinary work was done, and the same was done on the last day, that is, the twenty-third day of the seventh month. During the eight days, the people lived in booths, and also, offerings were presented unto God. The days in-between were to be spent in rejoicing before the LORD. This feast reminded the people of God's protection and provision during the wilderness years, and was also the time when the fruit of trees was harvested.

There was also **the Weekly Sabbaths** (Leviticus 23:3; Exodus 16:22-30; 20:9-11) when the children of Israel were to do no ordinary work, but rest from all their work and rest in God. On the Sabbaths, sacrifices were presented unto God in addition to the usual daily offerings. There was also the fiftieth year celebration, which was **the Year of Jubilee** (Leviticus 25:8-55), when all those who were in bondage were totally set free. Properties which were redeemable and sold were also released in the fiftieth year and returned to their original owners. The release in the year of Jubilee applied to Jews essentially, not non-Jews who were slaves or servants. It also did not apply to properties of non-Jews. All these feasts and festivals were part and parcel of the worship of God in the Old Covenant Era.

EXERCISE

Please state true or false to the statements below:

1. The feasts were times of remembering God's faithfulness towards His people.
2. The feasts were integral parts of the worship of God.
3. The feasts were times when the people went into wild parties in honour of God.
4. The LORD's Passover was held on the first day of the first month to usher in the Jewish New Year.
5. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was held in the first month, and was a time when all males must appear before God.
6. The First Fruit must first be presented to God before any of the harvest could be consumed by the people.
7. The Feast of Weeks was held fifty days after the First Fruit was presented to God, and so it was not a mandatory feast.
8. During the Feast of Tabernacles all the males lived in booths for seven days.
9. The Day of Atonement was also a day of national fasting.
10. The Feast of Trumpets heralded the Jewish Civil New Year.

11. The Year of Jubilee was the year in which every redeemable property that was sold was released to the original owner.
12. The Sabbath was a time when the people of God rested from their ordinary work and rested in God.
13. The feasts of the Old Covenant Era can be likened with our modern day celebrations like Christmas and Easter.
14. The feasts brought so many holidays for the people of God in the Old Covenant Era; it was not possible to do anything else.
15. All males who appear before God three times a year had to bring an offering unto God.