

The selected passages in this lesson give us a sampling of some of the various feasts that the LORD ordained that the children of Israel were to observe. The religious calendar of Israel began with the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread and included various other feasts throughout the year. Every fifty years marked a year of jubilee which allowed the people to start over and regain property lost due to hardship.

Leviticus 23

4 These *are* the feasts of the LORD, *even* holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons. 5 In the fourteenth *day* of the first month at even *is* the LORD's passover.

“These *are* the feasts of the LORD, *even* holy convocations [a sacred assembly], which ye shall proclaim in their seasons” – In vs. 1-3, the LORD sets the subject of this chapter: the feasts that were religious holidays that the children of Israel were to celebrate throughout the year. He reminds them of the sabbath day that they are to honor each week (v. 3) and then begins the list of “holy convocations” during which they were to gather together to celebrate a particular facet of the goodness of the LORD.

“In the fourteenth *day* of the first month at even *is* the LORD's passover” – The first feast in the list was the Feast of Unleavened Bread which began with the passover. The “first month” was the beginning of their religious calendar, as defined by the LORD in Exodus 12:1-14. The passover commemorated the day the LORD delivered them from the bondage of Egypt.

Verses 6-9: These verses give an overview of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which started the day after the passover. This feast lasted a week during which the bread that the children of Israel ate was to be unleavened only. They were also to offer burnt offerings each day in addition to the unleavened bread to commemorate the events of the original passover.

10 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: 11 And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.

Verses 10-14 describe the Feast of Firstfruits. Once they have taken up residence in the land of Canaan and are able to begin working the land, they are to honor the LORD with the firstfruits of the barley harvest. This offering was made the day after Passover to recognize that it was the LORD Who provided the harvest and to thank Him for its blessings. They were to bring a sheaf from the firstfruits of their harvest to the priest, who would then use it to make a wave offering before the LORD the next day after the sabbath (the Passover was considered a sabbath) in their behalf. Verses 12-14 describe the other offerings that they were to bring as part of the feast of firstfruits: a lamb for a burnt offering, a meal offering and a wine offering. They were not to eat of their harvest until these offerings had been made.

15 And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: 16 Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD.

Fifty days after the wave offering of the sheaf had been made (seven sabbaths) came the Feast of Weeks and was also called the Feast of Harvest or the Feast of Pentecost (“Pentecost” is Greek for “fifty”). This feast lasted one day and came at the end of the harvest. Thus it served to show gratitude to the LORD for providing for their needs through the abundance of the harvest. The feast was celebrated by offering a “meat” offering. The word translated “meat” can refer to anything that can be eaten, but in this case it refers to a grain offering. The word “new” is used because this offering came from the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, distinct from the earlier barley harvest celebrated by the Feast of Firstfruits (vs. 10-14). Verses 17-21 describe the offerings to be made during the Feast of Weeks, including wave offerings of two loaves of bread made with the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, burnt offerings of seven lambs, a bullock and two rams. A sin offering was made using a goat kid and two lambs were used for a peace offering.

Leviticus 25

11 A jubile shall that fiftieth year be unto you: ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather *the grapes* in it of thy vine undressed.

The Hebrew word for “sabbath” comes from a word meaning “to cease; to rest.” The LORD had already established that every seven days was a sabbath day in which the people rested. Verses 1-7 of this chapter remind the people that the LORD had established that every seven years would be a sabbath year so that the land could rest. They were not to work the land that year but let it lie fallow. Beginning in v. 8, the LORD describes the year of jubilee, which occurred every fifty years. It was similar to a sabbath year but it carried other benefits as well.

“A jubile [trumpet made from a ram's horn] shall that fiftieth year be unto you” – After the land had enjoyed seven sabbath years (49 years – v. 8), the following year was the year of jubilee. The Hebrew word for “jubilee” referred to a trumpet made from a ram's horn. On the day of atonement a priest was to blow the ram's horn to announce the beginning of the jubilee year (v. 9).

“ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather *the grapes* in it of thy vine undressed” – Just as in the sabbath year, they were not to work the land. They were not to sow a crop but allow whatever grew in their fields or vineyards naturally to grow untouched by human hand. They were also not allowed to reap whatever grew in their fields or vineyards that year for the purposes of storing it in their barns. However, they were allowed to eat from the fields to meet their daily needs (v. 12).

12 For it is the jubilee; it shall be holy unto you: ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field.

“For it is the jubilee; it shall be holy unto you” – They were not to treat this year as a business-as-usual time. They were to honor the time and fulfill the requirements of the year of jubilee.

“ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field” – While they were not allowed to harvest their fields and vineyards and store the produce in their barns as they would in other years, they were allowed to collect what they needed to eat on a daily basis. Agriculture was a significant portion of their sustenance and the LORD did not expect them to starve while trying to fulfill the requirements of the jubilee.

13 In the year of this jubilee ye shall return every man unto his possession.

One of the things that set jubilee apart from the normal sabbath years was the restoration that it provided. The LORD was giving land in Canaan to each tribe of Israel and each family within each tribe as an inheritance. However, it would not be unusual for someone to get in a financial bind and not be able to pay his debts. When this happened, he might have to sell his land or, in extreme cases, sell himself into slavery in order to pay his debts. The LORD commanded that when the year of jubilee came the poor man’s slavery would come to an end and he would be able to return to his property once again. The LORD commanded this so that no family would permanently lose the land that they inherited from the LORD. In vs. 14-17 the LORD dictates that they should not take advantage of one another or cheat one another out of their inheritance. When selling the land, the price would be pro-rated according to the number of years left before the jubilee year since the land would revert back to the seller at that time. The buyer was essentially buying the crops the land would produce until jubilee since they would not permanently own the land. The land actually belonged to the LORD (v. 23).

Verses 18-22: The LORD promises to provide for His people if they are obedient. He will insure that they will dwell safely in the land and that they will not suffer lack in the years when the land was enjoying its sabbath. The sixth year would produce enough food for three years so that they would not go hungry during the seventh (sabbath) year.

Verses 23-55: These verses cover the LORD’s statutes concerning the selling of real estate, particularly when the seller is poor and trying to make ends meet. The children of Israel were not to charge such a man interest when loaning him money to cover his debts. The LORD also made provisions for a man who has had to sell his land due to his poverty so that he can regain the property at the next jubilee. If a man’s extreme poverty requires that he sell himself as a slave, then they were not to make him work as an unpaid slave but as a hired servant (v. 39-43). At the next jubilee the man would go free and be able to return to the property that he had sold.