

# Liturgical Calendar

## The Feasts of God's People

### **SABBATH INTRO**

<sup>ESV</sup> Leviticus 23:1 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

<sup>2</sup> "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, These are the appointed feasts of the LORD that you shall proclaim as holy convocations; they are my appointed feasts.

<sup>3</sup> "Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the LORD in all your dwelling places.

<sup>4</sup> "These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them.

### **SPRING**

#### Passover

<sup>5</sup> In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD's Passover.

#### *Unleavened Bread*

<sup>6</sup> And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread.

<sup>7</sup> On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work.

<sup>8</sup> But you shall present a food offering to the LORD for seven days. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work."

#### *First Fruits*

<sup>9</sup> And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

<sup>10</sup> "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest,

<sup>11</sup> and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.

<sup>12</sup> And on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering to the LORD.

<sup>13</sup> And the grain offering with it shall be two tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, a food offering to the LORD with a pleasing aroma, and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, a fourth of a hin.

<sup>14</sup> And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

<sup>15</sup> "You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering.

### *Feast of Weeks/Pentecost*

<sup>16</sup> You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD.

<sup>17</sup> You shall bring from your dwelling places two loaves of bread to be waved, made of two tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour, and they shall be baked with leaven, as firstfruits to the LORD.

<sup>18</sup> And you shall present with the bread seven lambs a year old without blemish, and one bull from the herd and two rams. They shall be a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

<sup>19</sup> And you shall offer one male goat for a sin offering, and two male lambs a year old as a sacrifice of peace offerings.

<sup>20</sup> And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the LORD for the priest.

<sup>21</sup> And you shall make a proclamation on the same day. You shall hold a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work. It is a statute forever in all your dwelling places throughout your generations.

<sup>22</sup> "And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your

harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God."

## **AUTUMN**

### *Trumpets*

<sup>23</sup> And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

<sup>24</sup> "Speak to the people of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of solemn rest, a memorial proclaimed with blast of trumpets, a holy convocation.

<sup>25</sup> You shall not do any ordinary work, and you shall present a food offering to the LORD."

### *Day of Atonement*

<sup>26</sup> And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

<sup>27</sup> "Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be for you a time of holy convocation, and you shall afflict yourselves and present a food offering to the LORD.

<sup>28</sup> And you shall not do any work on that very day, for it is a Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God.

<sup>29</sup> For whoever is not afflicted on that very day shall be cut off from his people.

<sup>30</sup> And whoever does any work on that very day, that person I will destroy from among his people.

<sup>31</sup> You shall not do any work. It is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwelling places.

<sup>32</sup> It shall be to you a Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict yourselves. On the ninth day of the month beginning at evening, from evening to evening shall you keep your Sabbath."

### *Tabernacles/Booths*

<sup>33</sup> And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

<sup>34</sup> "Speak to the people of Israel, saying, On the fifteenth day of this seventh month and for seven days is the Feast of Booths to the LORD.

<sup>35</sup> On the first day shall be a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work.

<sup>36</sup> For seven days you shall present food offerings to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall hold a holy convocation and present a food offering to the LORD. It is a solemn assembly; you shall not do any ordinary work.

<sup>37</sup> "These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim as times of holy convocation, for presenting to the LORD food offerings, burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each on its proper day,

<sup>38</sup> besides the LORD's Sabbaths and besides your gifts and besides all your vow offerings and besides all your freewill offerings, which you give to the LORD.

<sup>39</sup> "On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD seven days. On the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest.

<sup>40</sup> And you shall take on the first day the fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days.

<sup>41</sup> You shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It is a statute forever throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month.

<sup>42</sup> You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths,

<sup>43</sup> that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God."

<sup>44</sup> Thus Moses declared to the people of Israel the appointed feasts of the LORD.

(Lev 23:1-44)

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## The Oldest Known Hebrew Text?

If you had to guess what may be perhaps the **oldest written text** in paleo-Hebrew, what would think it might

be? A theological tract? A genealogy? A short prayer? The answer is, a [calendar](#). Located some 20 miles northwest of Jerusalem is the Canaanite village known as Gezer. Slightly above the lush farming land of the area, on what are today hills of natural grass and weeds, there sits one of the few megalithic sites in Israel.

These standing stones of Gezer resemble some of the stone circles in Britain like Stonehenge, save that these are not in a circle, but a north/south line. Made up of ten such stones, an altar-type structure, and a large square stone base, the site was undoubtedly some kind of cultic place of worship for very ancient peoples. Its alignment of slightly offset stones that gave me the impression of a serpent when I visited, could possibly have been some kind of astronomical observatory. It was here that excavations in 1908 uncovered what they now call the Gezer calendar.



Gezer High Place  
Gezer National Park, Israel

Large Replica  
Gezer Calendar

The calendar itself, if that is what it is (scholars debate its actual purpose) reads:

Two months gathering (Oct, Nov — i.e. Tishrei, Cheshvan)  
Two months planting (December, January — Kislev, Tevet)  
Two months late sowing (February, March — Shvat, Adar)  
One month cutting flax (April — Nisan)  
One month reaping barley (May — Iyar)  
One month reaping and measuring grain (June — Sivan)  
Two months pruning (July, August — Tammuz, Av)  
One month summer fruit (September — Elul)  
Abij [ah]

The question I'm asking for today is, [why would a calendar be so important](#) that it would be perhaps the oldest Hebrew text we have today?

Think about it. Every one of us has calendars on our walls, on our phones, and we all use them to one degree or another. Calendars are what we plan our lives around. They set important dates, events, holidays, remembrances, meetings, and so on. [Without them, we would be lost](#) and could not function as cultural people.

I spoke with a friend this week about Leviticus 23 and whether he had any insights into the importance or significance of a chapter that is entirely devoted to [Israel's](#)

calendar or what I will call here, sacred time. He said he hadn't thought about it much and we moved on to other subjects. He happened to have listened to last week's sermon on Leviticus 22 and our discussion of sacred food and supping with the Lord. He's been thinking a lot about that topic and spoke long about the mysterious meaning and mystical moments of the Lord's Supper.

“Like all of Leviticus, this is about temple and sacred space,” he said. “And we are embodied persons who need sacred physical things in our lives like liturgy and holy communion. Bare words are not enough because we are not mere minds or brains in a vat. The church is not doing a good enough job of helping people see the relevance of not just the word of God but the Word of God made flesh and embodied and how this Word—Christ—applies to us even to this day his own person in forms that go beyond the preached word to the sacraments and personal fellowship and so on.” Certainly, I thought especially in light of this year of insanity (2020), each of us have learned just how much we not only want but need the regular physical presence of one another and to worship God together in person.

Then, suddenly, it hit me. **What if Leviticus 23 was really just an extension of this same kind of theme?** Let's retrace our steps for a moment to think about context, then we will get into the passage, and then we will think about how this amazing chapter still applies to us today.

## **A Calendar in Candle: Structure of Leviticus 23**

Recall that the book of Leviticus is **shaped after the pattern of the tabernacle**, so that the various chapters conform to the three spaces of the courtyard, the holy place, and the most holy place. Since chapter 18, we have been in the holy place. Here we saw three chapters dealing with **moral law** or how we are to behave in sacred space. Since we are God's people and he dwells with us, this means we are to behave these ways all the time and not just when we "go to church" for example. In chapters 21-22 we started to see how the **priest**, who is alone allowed to go into the holy place to attend to its care and upkeep and to perform rituals there are to be physically pure and how the food he eats which is sacrificed to the Lord by the people as offerings are likewise to be pure and unblemished. **Sacred or holy**



behavior moved to sacred priests and holy food and this now takes us to chapter 23 and its sacred or holy time.

Leviticus 23 is a long chapter that can be looked at in different ways, but the most important is that it delineates for you Israel's liturgical calendar. You can break the chapter up into two halves, these correspond to Spring festivals (Lev 23:5-22) and Fall festivals (23-43), with an Introduction (1-4) and Conclusion (44) on the ends.

You can also divide the chapter into “a series of five ‘divine speeches’, each of which is clearly demarcated by the introductory formula ‘and Yahweh spoke to Moses saying...’ (cf. Lev 23:1, 9, 23, 26, 33).<sup>1</sup> This seems to be Leviticus' own outline and what it does is combines the first three calendar events into one divine speech.

Yet another way of looking at the chapter is by noticing that there are seven ordained feasts (Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost/Weeks, Trumpets, Day of

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<sup>1</sup> Joel R. White, “‘He was Raised on the Third Day According to the Scriptures’ (1 Corinthians 15:4) A Typological Interpretation Based on The Cultic Calendar In Leviticus 23,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 66.1 (2015): 109-10 [103-119]. [https://www.academia.edu/36385142/He\\_was\\_Raised\\_on\\_the\\_Third\\_Day\\_according\\_to\\_the\\_Scriptures\\_1\\_Corinthians\\_15\\_4\\_A\\_Typological\\_Interpretation\\_Based\\_on\\_The\\_Cultic\\_Calendar\\_In\\_Leviticus\\_23](https://www.academia.edu/36385142/He_was_Raised_on_the_Third_Day_according_to_the_Scriptures_1_Corinthians_15_4_A_Typological_Interpretation_Based_on_The_Cultic_Calendar_In_Leviticus_23).

While few use these are the structure in their outline of the chapter, White does so as he addresses the fascinating implication that the creed cited in 1Co 15:4 may have as its “Scripture” our chapter, specifically Lev 23:10-11 and the sheaf of firstfruits which was to be waved before the Lord on the day after the Sabbath after Passover, the very day that Jesus rose from the dead.

Atonement, Tabernacles), each of which are various **days of rest or sabbaths**, and all of which come after the introduction that speaks about keeping God's Sabbath and holy convocations. What is particularly interesting about this to me is that there seems to be a discernable **chiasm** in the organization of these seven feasts which looks something like this:

### **The spring feasts**

1A **Passover** (a **one-day event**) precedes

1B A **weeklong feast** of **Unleavened Bread**

1C **Firstfruits**, when Jesus **rose from the dead**, the firstfruits of the **resurrection** (1Co 15:20-23)

**-- the central feast by itself --**

Ten Weeks (**Pentecost/Weeks**) on which the Torah and the Spirit was given (Ex 19-20, Act 2)

**-- the fall feasts**

2C **Trumpets**, **resurrection** of those who are His at His Coming (1Co 15:52; 1Th 4:16)

2B **Atonement** and a **week-long feast** of **Tabernacles**

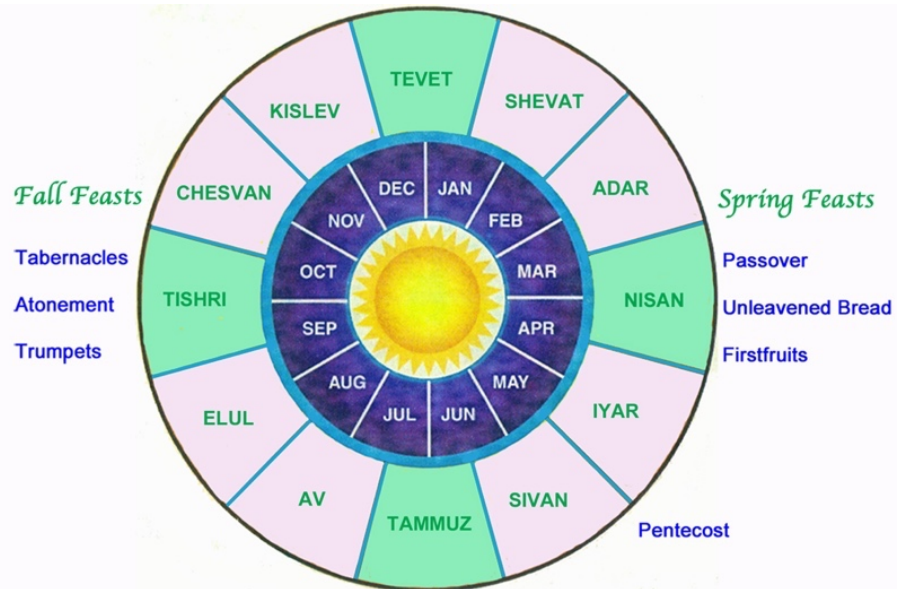
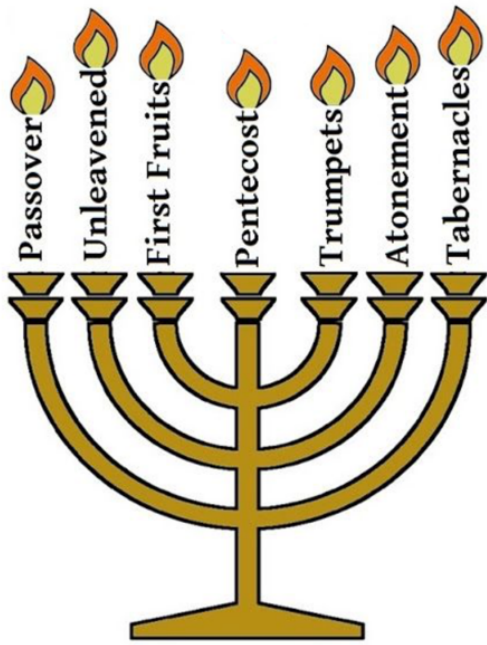
2A 8<sup>th</sup> Day (a **one-day event**) of Assembly follows<sup>2</sup>

What's so fascinating about this outline is that if you rotate this 90° you get a formation that looks exactly like **the**

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<sup>2</sup> **Christine Miller**, "Seven Annual Feast Days Bear Witness," *A Little Perspective* (Sept 17, 2013), <https://www.alittleperspective.com/seven-annual-feast-days-bear-witness-2/>.

menorah, with a center feast separated by time (50 days and 10 weeks) from the groupings of the other feasts.



Note how Pentecost in the candle is by itself and how Pentecost in the calendar is also by itself

What’s even more interesting about this is that the very next chapter begins by talking about this same candlestick, and it’s the first time in the entire book it has mentioned it. “Command the people of Israel to bring you pure oil from beaten olives for the lamp, that a light may be kept burning regularly” (Lev 24:2). Is this accidental, especially in a book that very much appears to be designed around the geography of the Tabernacle? With that, let’s take a look at our chapter.

# Sacred Time: The Sabbaths and Feasts of Israel

Our passage begins with that common phrase (found five times in this chapter), “The LORD [Memra] spoke to Moses, saying” (Lev 23:1). What our Savior will now tell Moses is to tell the people of Israel that “These are the appointed feasts of the LORD that you shall proclaim as holy convocations; they are my appointed feasts” (2). The word “feast” is the Hebrew *moed*. It refers to a place or time of meeting.

It appears in the creation week, “Then God said, ‘Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons [*moed*], and for days and years’” (Gen 1:14). Curiously, what are our feasts about? The spring and fall seasons, sacred time, the holy year. In this we can gather that God is directing the Israelite’s thought back to creation, telling his children that if they want to be properly oriented in this creation, they have to pay attention not merely to the common seasons that bring growth, heat, shedding of leaves, and snow so that you can plant and sow and reap and harvest, but that you must worship the God who created these seasons as you do

it! In other words, their calendar was a form of liturgy, patterning cyclical yearly worship for the entire nation of Israel from this moment forward, including the very life of our Lord Jesus and his Apostles, was oriented in its common liturgy around these sacred convocations.

Curiously, the word is also found in the first verse of Leviticus. “The LORD called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting” (Lev 1:1). “Meeting” is the word *moed*. It is the appointed place. These are the appointed feasts. And now we’ve seen these feasts patterned after things like the lampstand in the appointed place and this again ties us back to the tabernacle, the focal place of Leviticus and the place where all sacred liturgy and worship happened in Israel. These feasts are thus a microcosm or a celebratory expression of things that take place inside the tabernacle. This is particularly true with the sacrifices that they are associated with, but we are getting ahead of ourselves.

## *Sabbath*

First, we have to orient ourselves to a very special kind of time. This time is called “Sabbath.” Recalling the Fourth Commandment, “Six days shall work be done, but on the

seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest (*shabbat sabbaton*), a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the LORD in all your dwelling places” (Lev 23:3). A convocation is an assembly where the people are summoned together. This Sabbath applies throughout Israel and it for all the people. It is good news, for on this day they are not to do work. They are to rest. When Sabbath is turned into bad news, it loses its sweet taste and becomes a bitter drink to swallow. But as good news, who wouldn’t want a day off every seven days? God made the Sabbath for man, Jesus told us.

The point of bringing up the Sabbath is that these holy feasts are rooted deeply in the principle of sabbath-rest. “These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them” (4). Notice, these feasts are not optional, because they are *the LORD’s* feasts. They are not Israel’s feasts. They belong to God. As such, since he has saved them out of slavery in the very last verse of the previous chapter, since he is the one who sanctifies them in the verse just before that, the people are to honor these feasts and proclaim them. What does it mean to proclaim a feast? We’ll save that question for the end.

As you can already see though, this proclamation relates to the “**appointed time**” for each feast. God has appointed that each feast should take place on a certain day and time of the year. This **ties them to the seasons**, as we have already seen. As such, each feast would be built around parts of the **farming** year, which all peoples throughout the world celebrated in their own ways. But this is also **religious**. These feasts are acts of worship. Thus, the feasts would also tie into their **history** in some cases, where, for instance, God gave Torah to Moses at Pentecost (**Ex 19:1**). They would tie into **salvation**, for instance in the Day of Atonement and the days leading up to it which as we have seen in the central chapter (**Lev 16**) of the entire Pentateuch. And they would tie into the **future plans** that God would have for his chosen people. In one way or another, though, they all remind us of **that first creation week**, where, at the end of it, we find God taking his own Sabbath as he is enthroned as King over the creation he has just created. In this, Israel is most of all to rest.

## *Passover*

The first feast is “**in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight** (Israel’s day began at twilight,

not at midnight). This feast is “the LORD’s Passover” (Lev 23:5). This refers back to that greatest night in Israel’s history when God killed the firstborn of Egypt while passing over the Israelite houses.

The story goes that during that night, the each and every man was to take of his flock a lamb for their household (Ex 12:3). As we saw in Leviticus 22, it was to be a lamb without blemish, but also a male a year old. They were to kill their lambs at twilight (6), then take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the house in which they would then eat the lamb together (7), ingesting the very sacrifice that would later that night spare their lives. They were to eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (8) and leave none of it until the morning, for they were to leave in haste from the land of slavery (10-11).

Essentially, what is happening here is that the Jewish religious year is kicking off with the memory of Yahweh’s mighty salvation out of slavery performed in the most extraordinary of ways in human history. This properly orients the Israelites for the new year to the correct spiritual alignment. He faces his God, the God who saved him. He turns and teaches the story to his children through the family ritual of Passover. The year begins anew with the



children of God poised to embark on a new cycle recalling the grace and goodness of their God.

Notice the temporal markers, which are so important throughout this chapter. It is the **first month**, which shows that we are beginning the new year. God did this deliberately, as we learn in Exodus 12. It is the **fourteenth day**. Fourteen is two times seven. **Seven, of course, is the day of Sabbath**. On the seventh day, God rested (**Gen 2:2**). And so, Passover is an extraordinarily holy Sabbath day. It is important here to know that this is not a fixed day of our Gregorian solar year, because Israel had a lunar-solar calendar. This is why Passover can be on a Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, and so on. The year Jesus died it was on a Thursday. Nevertheless, it is the “14” that embeds the day with “sabbath” rest, even if it doesn’t fall on a Saturday.

The **importance** of this day has been understood for long over 3,000 years. That right there should show you **the power of a calendar**. It has the ability, if followed, to preserve knowledge and the knowledge of God unlike many other things in this world. As someone notices about Passover, **“Interestingly, the only sound indicated during**

this ritual was the sound of children asking a question and parents answering them (Ex 12:26-27).”<sup>3</sup>

## *Unleavened Bread*

Perhaps because Exodus elaborates so long on the Passover, and everyone knew the story already, only one verse is devoted to it before moving on to the second feast—the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Notice that it comes on the “fifteenth day” (Lev 23:6) of the same month, meaning that it comes the day after Passover. Why? In part, it is because this feast continues the celebration of Passover in that it was during Passover that they were commanded to eat with unleavened bread. (This is also confirmed by the natural division “And the LORD spoke to Moses” not coming until after this feast finishes.)

This feast lasts longer than Passover. For an entire week, they would eat only unleavened bread, reminding them every day of that Passover night and how they had to leave in haste the next morning and so there was no time to make

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<sup>3</sup> Russell Huizing, *The Importance of Ritual for Follower Development: An Intertexture Analysis of Leviticus 23 in the Pauline Corpus*, Doc. Phil. Dissertation to Regent University (2013), 135.  
[https://www.academia.edu/7273013/The\\_Importance\\_of\\_Ritual\\_for\\_Follower\\_Development\\_An\\_Intertexture\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Leviticus\\_23\\_in\\_the\\_Pauline\\_Corpus](https://www.academia.edu/7273013/The_Importance_of_Ritual_for_Follower_Development_An_Intertexture_Analysis_of_Leviticus_23_in_the_Pauline_Corpus).

bread with leaven. Beginning on the **fifteenth** (like 14, 15 now becomes a “**first day**” in a cycle of 7; see **vs. 7**), for **seven** days, they would eat unleavened bread. Like the first day, the fifteenth, was to be a holy convocation and they were not allowed to do any ordinary work. In other words, here we have a “sabbath” taking place not on the seventh day, but on the first day (be it Sunday or Wednesday or Friday or whatever).

The feast lasts those seven days, during which **food offerings** were presented to the LORD. It concludes with the seventh day which is, likewise, a holy convocation where they were not to do any work (**8**). This means that whatever the seventh day was, so also the first day was, because both are described with identical language. This is important for something we will talk about later.

### *Firstfruits*

The **feast of Firstfruits** begins the second natural division of the chapter with, “**And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying...**” (**Lev 23:9**). He was to tell the people of Israel, “**When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, and he shall wave the sheaf before the**

LORD, so that you may be accepted” (10-11a). We’ve seen the “wave” offerings before. This time, it is a sheaf of the firstfruits of the harvest that is waved by the priest before God.

On this same day, a year-old male lamb without blemish was to be offered as a burnt offering to the LORD (12). Next, a grain offering of 2/10 an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil would be a food offering to the LORD as a pleasing aroma, and a drink offering of wine ¼ of a hin would be brought (13). Obviously, the idea is one of communion with God, which we saw in the previous chapter.

This feast celebrated the arrival of Israel into the Promised Land, so at the time of its receiving, that had not yet occurred. It was to be celebrated on a very specific day. That day is, “On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it” (11). But what days is this? We have two sabbaths in this story. Many have thought it is the first day of Unleavened Bread sabbath, and so the wave offering takes place on the sixteenth day. However, it seems better to read it as referring to the weekly sabbath, which means that it would take place on the Sunday of the feast.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For why this “first day” is Sunday, see Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 304 and White, “He was Raised.”

This feast-law finishes by saying that they were not allowed to eat bread or grain until they had brought their firstfruits to God in the form of the sacrifice and offered the wave offering to the LORD. They were entering the new land and this first produce was his. This was to remain throughout their generations (14).

### *Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks*

Israel was then to count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought [the sheaf of the wave offering](#) (15). If the waving of the sheaf in the previous feast marked the beginning of the grain harvest, this sheaf-wave marks its end. In them both, the priest is acknowledging that really, the entire harvest belongs to God, who graciously allows his people to eat of its produce.

Notice again the number seven. Here we have seven sevens (a week is seven days). When you add the Sabbath day from which the counting begins, you end up with fifty days (16). 50 years is the year of Jubilee and the Jubilee year is the Great Sabbath Year where all debts were cancelled. This is a microcosm of that idea. It is for this many weeks of time that the feast is sometimes called the feast of [Weeks](#). But it is also

called **Pentecost**, from the Greek word *pentēkostos* which means “fiftieth.” Pentecost is the fiftieth day after Easter Sunday or what is probably **the same day as the wave offering of the firstfruits**.

During this feast they were to bring two loaves of **bread** to be waved, made of 2/10 of an ephah of fine flour, baked **with leaven** (cf. **Lev 2:11; 7:13**), as firstfruits (**23:17**). Firstfruits are the first of the years’ crop. Whereas the Firstfruits feast may have celebrated the barley harvest,<sup>5</sup> Pentecost probably celebrated the grape harvest.<sup>6</sup> This feast was much more elaborate. They would offer seven lambs a year old without blemish along with one bull and two rams. These were burnt offerings, along with a grain offering and drink offerings for food and a pleasing aroma to the LORD (**18**). They would also offer a goat for s in offering and two male lambs for peace offerings (**19**). These were waved with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering, with the two lambs which were holy to the LORD for the priest to eat (**20**).

It was likewise a sabbath, even though it would have been on a first day (i.e. 50<sup>th</sup>) (**21**). Curiously, a shorter version of the law in **Lev 19:9-10** about allowing the poor

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<sup>5</sup> **White**, 111; **Wenham**, 303.

<sup>6</sup> **Wenham**, 304 and compare with Lev 19:9-10.

to glean the leftovers of the land (23:22), reiterating that God has all of the people in mind for this feast.

## *Trumpets*

At this point we move many weeks into the future, thus making Pentecost stand out from all the other feasts as a day by itself. Spring turns to Summer and Summer becomes Fall. “The LORD spoke to Moses, saying” (23) creates our third natural division of the book. This now introduces the feast of Trumpets. “In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a day of solemn rest, a memorial proclaimed with blast of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work, and you shall present a food offering to the LORD” (24-25). Depending on the year, because this is a lunar calendar, we could be in September or October. Here we have the sabbath idea returning both in terms of resting and in terms of the seventh month. Yet, this one is on the “first day” which again ties to earlier feasts of sabbath rest. The idea of a trumpet is that it announces.

Wenham explains what is happening agriculturally,

In this month the dry hot summer draws to an end, the grapes and olives are picked, and the Israelite starts to look forward to the coming of the rains. In a good year these would begin in October and last until March. The seventh month, then, marked the end of the agricultural year and the beginning of a new one. Farm work was at a minimum and there was time to take stock spiritually and materially. The festivals in this month have a more solemn flavor than those in spring. Four extra sabbaths are prescribed in the space of one month including the most holy day of atonement (vv. 25, 28, 35, 36).<sup>7</sup>

### *Day of Atonement*

The Day of Atonement marks our fourth natural division. “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Now on the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement’” (26-27). All of chapter 16 was dedicated to this most holy of all days of the year. So, quite possibly, you can think of the trumpet announcing this coming Day of Atonement.

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<sup>7</sup> Wenham, 305.



Tradition has it that these ten days were used to prepare the Jew for this coming day of purging away of all sin. They got that idea from **vs. 29**. “For whoever is not afflicted on that very day shall be cut off from his people.” They were to be in a state of preparedness to receive atonement.

Being “cut off” is serious. But even more serious is that if you do any work on this day, “that person I will destroy from among his people” (**30-31**). This is perhaps the greatest of all sabbaths in Israel. Certainly, this is the strongest language used for someone who violates it. Hence, this is “a Sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict yourselves” (**32**, cf. **28**). The law ends, “On the ninth day of the month beginning at evening, from evening to evening shall you keep your Sabbath,” thus reinforcing the timing and the orientation you were to have as you prepared yourself and went through this great Holy Day.

### *Feast of Booths/Tabernacles*

The religious calendar comes to a conclusion in the **seventh feast** and the fifth natural break. “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying ... On the fifteenth day of this seventh month and for seven days is the Feast of Booths to

the LORD” (33-34). Again, notice the numbers 15 (which is a “first day”) along with seven and seven. We’ve seen them all before and they are all symbolizing sabbath, as we will see. What is this feast about?

It is a week-long feast that begins “on the first day” with “a holy convocation; you shall not any ordinary work” (35). For seven days you present food offerings to the LORD. It concludes on a very special eighth day where you hold a holy convocation with all the people of Israel and offer a food offering to the LORD. This is “a solemn assembly; you shall not do any ordinary work” (36). So here we have a 1<sup>st</sup> and an 8<sup>th</sup> (another 1<sup>st</sup>) both being sabbaths.

During this series of feasts you “proclaim” as a holy convocation, we might say as a church (*ekklesia* is not used in LXX Leviticus, but is many other places for the same idea), through food offerings, burnt offerings, grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, all on their proper days (37), along with gifts and vow offerings and freewill offerings (38). This is the greatest of all the feasts in terms of the sacrificial system. The proclamation is that you are God’s people, that you belong to him, that he rules your life, orders your affairs, walks with you through the year, provides for your needs, saves you from your sins, sanctifies

you from your uncleanness, and is worthy of all your worship.

“On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD seven days. On the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest. And you shall take on the first day the fruit of the splendid trees, branches of palm trees and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days” (39-40). And how would they do it? By feasting (41) and celebrating the harvest. And by “dwelling in booths” (42). These are little family-sized tabernacles that are presumably made up of these various trees branches and leaves. These were temporary huts that all Israel made as they made this annual trek (later) to Jerusalem and all dwelt outside the city on the hills around. Why? “That your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (43). In this way, the calendar comes to an end the way it began, by reminding them of their God and where they came from and where they have come by his good leading grace through this past year and for each year since that glorious Exodus.

“Thus Moses declared to the people of Israel the appointed feasts of the LORD” (44), because Moses was the man of God, faithful to proclaim as the prophet all the words of the LORD to the people. He is so renowned because he was so faithful to deliver God’s word in its totality.

## Liturgy for our Lives

As we Christians think about these feasts today, what should we make of them? What is their relevance to us? Let’s first tackle the question of **whether they should be celebrated** as they were celebrated in the old covenant. That should be easy to answer because most of them required animal sacrifices. To celebrate them *as they did back then* would be to necessitate animal sacrifices. Therefore, no, a Christian not only should not but must not celebrate them as they did in the old covenant.

**Does this mean we should not celebrate them at all?** This is a thornier question. Christians have been divided. We share space with a group of **Messianic Jews** who meet on Saturday. They celebrate each of the Feasts of Israel, though not with animal sacrifices and not in the identical ways they did in the OT. They are also *Messianic Jews* and so they do

see NT meaning in what they are doing. [Early Christianity](#) created a Church Calendar that probably began by importing Christian ideas into these feasts. Over time, it grew to include all kinds of other things (like saint so and so holy day, etc.). But the idea was that there would be a special service on those feast days dedicated to thinking about those days through what Christ had done and all Christians were strongly encouraged to attend.

[Many Christians today](#) celebrate at least some of these feasts, but usually through their NT expression only. It is rare to find a Christian who will not celebrate Easter Sunday as the day Jesus rose from the dead. He may not call it “Easter” (a pagan term), but he still celebrates the resurrection on this day. Is it among these feasts? Yes! It is the day of the wave offering of the firstfruits festival, which takes place during Unleavened Bread.

What we are seeing here is that there does seem to be some continuity between celebrations in the new covenant and celebrations in the old covenant and that virtually every Christian recognizes this, even if it is unknowingly. But there is also a great deal of [discontinuity](#) as well. My friend, a retired Jewish Reformed Baptist pastor from Israel, Baruch Maoz, has some helpful words here.

The ritual aspects of the Law, its symbols, hopes and expectations, all find fulfillment in Jesus. Having been fulfilled, they no longer have the religious value they had in the past yet ... The shadows have passed to give room for the reality, and it is not right for us to insist upon those shadows as if they were still in force. The Mosaic religious institutions, including the sacrifices; the feasts; the specific form of the Sabbath duties; and the restrictions and requirements in terms of dress codes, beards and the such like, are no longer binding. Nor may we exercise our liberty by living as if they were binding. It is our glad and happy duty to demonstrate by our lives, our worship and our communal behavior that Messiah has come.<sup>8</sup>

On top of this he adds that “yet, for us Jewish Christians, they form part of our national culture.”<sup>9</sup> What he is saying is that to celebrate these feasts *as Jews* is a lot like an American celebrating the Fourth of July. It is part of our cultural heritage. And, these days, these feast days in Israel are as strange a blend of the secular and religious as is our July 4 in America. They are hardly the Mosaic commandment feasts with full blown sacrifices even for them! But Gentile

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<sup>8</sup> Baruch Maoz, *Judaism is Not Jewish: A Friendly Critique of the Messianic Movement* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2003), 127.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Christians he believes shouldn't observe them because they have been fulfilled in Christ.

His words on Christian liberty should be noted. What does this mean? Someone else suggests, “If a Christian congregation occasionally reenacts aspects of an Old Testament feast day for the sake of better understanding their old covenant heritage, it would be within the bounds of Christian liberty. However, such reenactments should be done with a clear, conscious awareness that they are not required of Christians, convey no special spiritual benefits, and are strictly of educational value.”<sup>10</sup> I think this may go a little too far, but only because there is clearly some kind of continuity in the rites. That said, anyone who would celebrate these feasts without the light of Christ taking away their shadows would be abusing them, and no spiritual benefit would accrue whatsoever. In fact, you may even be cursed for not acknowledging the Messiah.

As Jesus himself as the Angel of the LORD told Isaiah, “Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them” (Isa 1:14). As he told Amos, “I hate, I despise your

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<sup>10</sup> Dan Vander Lugt, “Should Christians Keep the Old Testament Feasts?” Questions.org (no date), <https://questions.org/attq/should-christians-keep-the-old-testament-feasts/>.

feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies ... I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation” (Amos 5:21; 8:10). For their idolatry and adultery, for their faithlessness and mere outward religion that denied Christ in all of his OT expressions (not to mention did not believe in the NT promises), he sent them away into captivity.

Yet, if they turned to him and acknowledged him he told Ezekiel, “This also I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them: to increase their people like a flock. Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of people. *Then they will know that I am the LORD*” (Ezek 36:37-38). It’s about knowing the Lord, the Lord Jesus, acknowledging him, an orienting your whole life around his in worship.

Thus, I want to finish our time by investigation this idea more fully of what does it mean to “proclaim” as Moses says. We’ve seen that there were many proclamations—about creation, about seasons and harvests, and mostly about God’s provision and salvation and forgiveness. These were proclamations to one another, to their children, and most important, to their God. But there were also future



proclamations embedded in the feasts. It isn't possible to give them all here. Entire books have been written on this topic.<sup>11</sup>

There is a wonderful blog on many chiasms in the Bible. The author wrote of our passage today, “Since the annual feast days are pictured by the menorah, we can conclude that each day shines a light, that bears witness to something.”<sup>12</sup> That's a great way to think about these proclamations. She gives a brief summary for each feast that is devotional and worth repeating here.

The feast day of **Passover** ... bears witness to the Passover Lamb, who was crucified on this day, and shed His blood for our sins, that the angel of death might pass over us.

The feast day of **Unleavened Bread** ... bears witness to the Holy and Righteous God to whom we now belong. For now

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<sup>11</sup> Many are Messianic Jews and come with that strong OT flavor. Many others are Dispensational and use the Fall feasts to give end-times calendars. To that extent, these are rooted in speculation. But most of these also have good information on things that have already happened. From a Reformed perspective there is **John R. Sittema**, *Meeting Jesus at the Feast: Israel's Festivals and the Gospel* (Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 2010). There is also a dissertation on this: **Russell Huizing**, *The Importance of Ritual for Follower Development: An Intertexture Analysis of Leviticus 23 in the Pauline Corpus*, Doc. Phil. Dissertation to Regent University (2013),

[https://www.academia.edu/7273013/The\\_Importance\\_of\\_Ritual\\_for\\_Follower\\_Development\\_An\\_Intertexture\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Leviticus\\_23\\_in\\_the\\_Pauline\\_Corpus](https://www.academia.edu/7273013/The_Importance_of_Ritual_for_Follower_Development_An_Intertexture_Analysis_of_Leviticus_23_in_the_Pauline_Corpus); **Jessie Blackman and Susha Roberts**, “7 Feasts That Point To Christ,” Wycliffe (no date), <https://www.wycliffe.org/feast/7-feasts-that-point-to-christ>.

<sup>12</sup> **Christine Miller**, “Seven Annual Feast Days Bear Witness,” *A Little Perspective* (Sept 17, 2013), <https://www.alittleperspective.com/seven-annual-feast-days-bear-witness-2/>.

that we have been forgiven of sins, we cleanse our lives of sin, which yeast represents, and keep our lives free of sin.

The feast day of **Firstfruits** ... bears witness to the resurrection from the dead of Jesus our Messiah, who was raised from the dead with new life on this day.

The feast day of **Weeks, or Pentecost** ... bears witness that the Torah – God’s Word – and the Spirit are one, and that we need the Spirit in order to walk in Torah, and that we need the Torah in order to walk in the Spirit! And that, by the Torah and the Spirit, we are to walk as we await the coming of Jesus our Bridegroom!

The feast day of **Trumpets** ... proclaims prophetically that Jesus is returning again, and that we will likewise be raised from the dead as He was, at His coming!

The feast day of **Tabernacles** ... proclaims prophetically that Jesus is returning as a Bridegroom for His Bride – who is us! – and that at His return, He will dwell with us and we with Him!

The feast day of **the 8th Day of Assembly** ... proclaims prophetically that we will spend eternity with YHVH, beyond time and space!

Let’s dwell a little longer on a few of these.

First, **Passover** is not just the day on which the Lord Jesus died for our sins, it was also the night (remember, the Jewish

“day” begins in the evening of what would be the previous day for us) that **Jesus took bread**, broke it, and gave the Mosaic institution its fullest meaning. Therefore, though we do not celebrate “The Passover” like Jews do, each time we take the Lord’s Supper we are in fact remembering this event, not only of their Exodus, but so much more of the entire church’s—from Adam to the Eschaton, for all who are saved by faith alone through the work of Christ on the cross. More than that, we are literally **communing with God** as we ingest this thank offering into our own bodies, showing us the spiritual union that we have with Christ and with one another.

Next, there is something more to be said about the **wave offering** of the feast of firstfruits. Matthew Henry writes, “This sheaf of first-fruits was typical of our Lord Jesus, who has risen from the dead as the *first-fruits of those that slept* (**1Co 15:20**). That *branch of the Lord* (**Isa 4:2**) was then presented to him, in virtue of the sacrifice of himself, the Lamb of God, and it was accepted for us. It is very observable that our Lord Jesus rose from the dead on the very day that the first-fruits

were offered, to show that he was the substance of this shadow.<sup>13</sup>

One modern scholar has made a fascinating argument that earlier in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul gives us an early creed that says Christ died “on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1Co 15:4). While many see here a reference to the sign of Jonah or to a prophecy in Hosea, he argues that Paul would naturally have understood this wave offering as a “third day” ritual on that particular year, thus linking “the Scripture” back to Leviticus 23, in a manner similar to Henry and others.<sup>14</sup>

Here we want to connect now the next feast of Pentecost. We know that it was on Pentecost that tongues of fire came down, Peter preached the first great sermon, and the Christian church began officially. In this way, the feast was certainly anticipating the coming of the Spirit to his new covenant church. But there is more. During this feast, there was a second wave offering that ended to celebration of the Spring harvest. Paul links this second

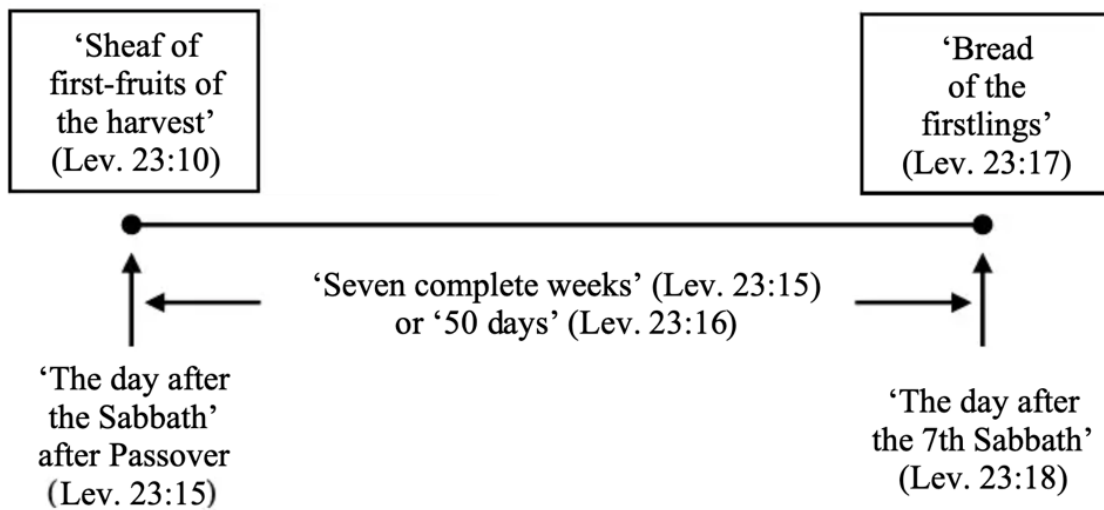
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<sup>13</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 179.

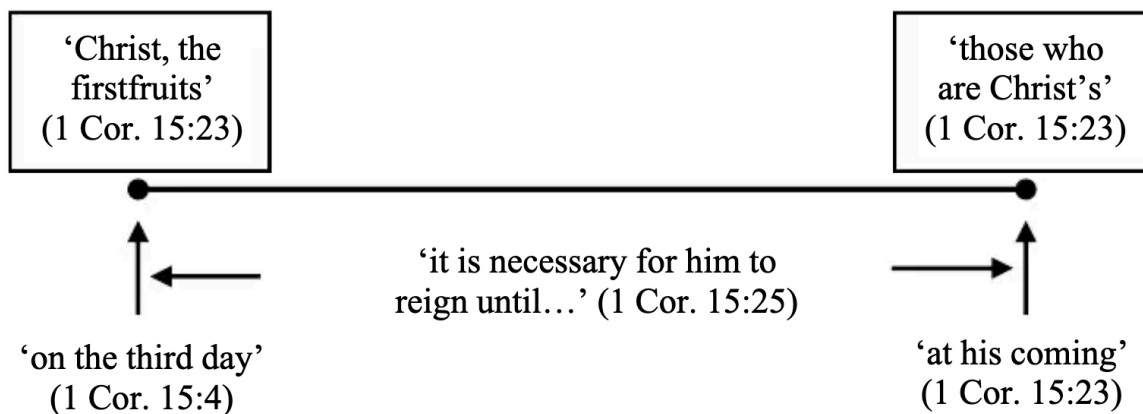
<sup>14</sup> Joel R. White, “He was Raised on the Third Day,” especially pp. 115-118. He isn't wholly convincing to me on this point. But his strongest argument is that Paul is clearly connecting the resurrection, which is “the third day” in the creed to the feast of firstfruits, and later, to the feast of Pentecost where the second sheaf is waved.

offering on Pentecost to the first offering on Firstfruits in such a way that, “The sheaf of firstfruits stands in the same relationship to the subsequent harvest as the resurrection of Christ stands to the future resurrection of believers.”<sup>15</sup> In this way, it not only predicts what has already occurred, but what shall occur at our resurrection in the future.

### The Feast of Weeks (Lev. 23:9-13)



### The Resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20-28)



<sup>15</sup> White, 118.

To go in a slightly different direction for a moment, though it will end up back at the same places, we can consider **all of these “sabbath” numbers** throughout the festival calendar year. Those numbers include both sevens and fourteens and forty-nines, which is to be expected, since any factor of seven would also be a seven and thus sabbath, but also firsts and eights and fifteens and fifties. These are not factors of sevens, but in a week of seven days they all return to firsts.

When was Christ raised? **On the first day of the week** (**Matt 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1**; something Paul also brings up at the beginning of **1Co 16**). Christians have long said that this is **the Christian “Sabbath.”** This idea goes back to antiquity.

Many make the argument that what is happening here is that the Christian Sabbath somehow **“replaces”** the Jewish “Sabbath,” which refers to the seventh day of the week, and this is why Christians always held Sunday as holy, but not particularly Saturday (our culture does both to accommodate Jews and Christians). I do think that the shadows of the seventh day have given way and that Christians are to worship God and rest on the first day, because of the resurrection. But there is a lot more

continuity here than I think a lot of people recognize. Christians didn't just make this up.

I believe, based on the fulfillment of so many of these feasts in Jesus' death and resurrection, that this is **deeply sabbath related**. That is, all of these "first" days are also sabbaths. They were to do no work on them. In other words, the first day (eighth, fifteenth, fiftieth) are all sabbaths during the holy calendar. If Jesus is fulfilling these feasts, and these feasts are 1<sup>st</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup> sabbaths, then it makes sense that the early Christians understood **these sabbaths to be fulfilled in Christ's resurrection**. Therefore, it isn't so much that the seventh day *which used to be sabbath* suddenly becomes first day *that now becomes sabbath*, but that the meaning pregnant in all of the 1<sup>st</sup> day sabbaths in the OT is that they point to a "new" creation, whereas the seventh pointed to the old creation (though also anticipated the new). Christians simply understood that **the new creation has now come** (2Co 5:17; Gal 6:15; Rev 21:1; etc.) in Christ through his first-day resurrection, which is exactly what these festival sabbaths were predicting! So in one say, we don't have just a few great festival days, we have 52 of them, one every single week! God reorients us properly that often!

I only have time for **one more**. This one deals with **Christ's birth**, which we incorrectly celebrate at Christmas. Henry writes, "It is supposed by many that our blessed Saviour was born much about the time of this feast [Tabernacles]; then he left his mansions of light above to *tabernacle among us* (Jn. 1:14)." <sup>16</sup> Essentially, he and others are arguing that **John 1:14** is John's birth narrative of Jesus! <sup>17</sup>

There is also good reason to believe that Jesus was actually **born on Rosh Hoshana**, 3 BC. This happens to have been September 11, 3BC and also would have been the day of the **feast of Trumpets** on that particular year. This all has to do with the alignment of Jupiter and the sun in the constellation Virgo according to the prophecy explained in Revelation 12. <sup>18</sup> Either way, it is clear that these feasts were announcing

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<sup>16</sup> Henry, 180.

<sup>17</sup> See especially John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: Or A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures*, New Edition., vol. 1 (Tegg & Company, 1839), 552.

<sup>18</sup> This is incorrect in terms of his actual birth into the world out of the womb of the virgin, but quite possible in terms of his conception into that same womb. Jesus was very clearly born during the census and this was not in winter! Furthermore, Revelation 12 seems to be something called astral prophecy, and this prophecy, when you understand how the stars work, puts his birthday on September 11, 3 BC.

See Ernest L. Martin, "The Time of Jesus' Birth," Ch. 5 of *The Star that Astonished the World* (1991), <http://www.askelm.com/star/star006.htm>. Endorsed by F. F. Bruce and others. For a video and short commentary from someone else on the 9-11 date, see Michael Heiser, "The Birthday of Jesus Christ (September 11, 3 BC), *YouTube* (May 13, 2012), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWsPWkFz\\_14](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWsPWkFz_14). For a much longer written explanation of the following see Michael Heiser's novel *The Portent* ch. 56, *The Façade Saga* (Bellingham, WA: Kirkdale Press, 2014).



the coming of Christ, even as many believe that at “the last trumpet” they will announce his Second Coming.

The point of all of this really is to show us that the calendar really is an incredibly important tool that God gave to his people. For it points us back while also showing us what is to come. For Christians, we have so much more than they did in the OT, and our worship is still around the same calendar—only in light of Christ’s coming. Are you orienting your life to the patterns of the spiritual seasons of his birth, life (I didn’t have time to tell you all about his various miracles done on the feasts during his life!), death, resurrection, ascension, sending of the Spirit, creating of the church, and coming again to judge the living and the dead? Has this become your daily and weekly liturgy and worship as you performs your sacrifices of mercy and praise in his NT temple which is filling the earth? Perhaps you are having trouble doing just that. If so, heed these last words of the great Matthew Henry who told us, “The gospel of Christ teaches us to dwell in tabernacles, to sit loose to this world, as those that have here no continuing city, but by faith, and hope and holy contempt of present things, to go out to Christ without the camp, Heb. 13:13, 14.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Matthew Henry, 180.

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