

Leviticus Chapter 23 – John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is “Special Days”. Give me a second and I’ll tell you why it’s special. ☺
 - a) For the last good number of lessons, I’ve been discussing the topic of “obedience to God in every day life”. I’ve been using the expression “These chapters are not so much about our “Sunday behavior”, but on how to obey God “Monday through Saturday”.
 - b) The last two chapters were still about our everyday behavior, but it focused on the behavior of the priests. It was additional requirements for the priests over and above what is required of all other Israelites. With the privilege of being a priest comes the responsibility of being a priest. The last lesson discussed the Christians role as priests. To be a priest simply means we help intercede between other people and God.
 - c) Now we’re done with “everyday” requirements. Now we come to the topic of “special days”. It is as if God is saying, “The last bunch of chapters is how I want you to act every day in your relationship with Me. However, there are special days throughout the year where I want you to stop working and perform specific rituals.”
2. OK, So God ordained seven special holidays for the Israelites plus the weekly Sabbath. Do we as Christians have to observe them? The short answer is no.
 - a) When you study the New Testament, the Jewish-Christians never compelled the non-Jewish Christians to observe any of these holidays. Today, many Jewish Christians still observe them as part of their allegiance to being one of the “Chosen People” as well as a belief in Jesus as Messiah. We’ll discuss Christians and the Sabbath more later.
3. If I as a believer in Jesus don’t have to observe these holidays, why should I study them?
 - a) Like everything else in Leviticus, there are wonderful word pictures that teach us about trusting God. All these holidays give great examples about faith-in-general and our relationship with God Himself. This will be the central focus of the lesson. God uses “special days” to remind us of our trust in Him for every aspect of our lives.
 - b) Second, they are prophetic word-pictures of Jesus in these special days. The first three holidays tie to the events of Jesus First Coming. Some believe the last three then tie to His Second Coming. The middle holiday is specifically tied to the birth of the church itself.
4. I want to also discuss the concept of having “special days” for God. There are some Christian groups that don’t like Christmas and Easter because those holidays have some pagan roots. They argue every Sunday is special and you don’t need special church days. For example, the exact date of Jesus’ birth is unknown. December 25th was picked to be the day we celebrate that fact.
 - a) The point is if God ordains special days to acknowledge certain historical facts in Jewish history, I don’t have a problem with Christianity picking specific days to focus on different aspects of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. I also don’t have a problem with a nation picking a special day per year to remember its birth or to honor one of its heroes. Again, if a “special day” is good enough for God, it’s good enough for you and me!
 - b) Does the Easter holiday have pagan roots? Yes it does. The word “Easter” is taken from a Babylonian word of a pagan god. When Christianity first became popular, the time of the resurrection of Jesus was combined with a popular pagan spring holiday of that era. Do people today think about that pagan god when we got to church? Of course not. We use that day to commemorate Jesus’ resurrection. Shouldn’t we focus every Sunday on Jesus’ resurrection? Sure, but if this holiday helps draw “casual Christians” to church to remember that fact, then it does far more good than bad, and we should leave it alone.
 - i) Ok, off my soapbox. ☺ Some groups like the Jehovah Witnesses won’t celebrate Christmas and Easter due to its pagan roots, but I see it doing far more good than harm, so I say Merry Christmas and Happy Easter. ☺
5. Before I get started, one thing that is barely discussed in this chapter is the priests’ themselves.
 - a) The chapter is addressed to all of Israel, and not just the priests.

- b) I mention this because the last two chapters focused on the priests.
 - c) The chapters before that were addressed to all Israelites.
 - d) Now we're back to all the Israelites in this chapter. Why does God jump back and forth?
 - e) The answer is the priests are involved in this chapter, but they are in "background".
 - i) All of these feasts require religious assembly. Who do you think is leading these religious assemblies? The answer is the high priest and his assistants.
 - ii) Which leads back to our role as priests as mentioned earlier in the introduction.
 - iii) An example of a Christian "special day" is whenever Christians assemble as a group. It does not mean all Christians are required to be the leaders, but we are to each lead-by-example. The "higher calling" of us Christians is not only to be there among the assembly but to be a good example to others and minister to others as the needs arise.
 - f) As we study these special days, we will focus on the purpose of each holiday. That is the central idea. Each has applications to our lives. With that said, let's get started:
6. Verse 1: The LORD said to Moses, ² "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: `These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the LORD, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies. ³ " `There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to the LORD.
- a) Verses 1 and 2 are the "overtures" of the whole chapter. It is God saying in effect, "The next 42 verses are to describe all the days of the year where you are not to work, but to stop and focus upon Me."
 - b) Verse 3 gives a one-line reference to the weekly Sabbath. One of the ideas being presented is that one does not skip the weekly Sabbath in order to observe these other holidays.
 - c) The weekly Sabbath is one day out of the week where all Jewish people were to stop working and to assemble in groups to worship God. That did not mean they all had to come to the central tabernacle once they were in the Promised Land. The focus is on stopping work and focusing upon God.
 - i) The term "Saturday" did not come into existence until many centuries after this law. In modern times, the Jewish nation associates Saturday with the Sabbath.
 - ii) Just how a Jewish person is supposed to "rest" is a complicated topic. There are hundreds of pages of official Jewish commentary on how one is to rest. It starts with, "How do you make a living? Don't do that on Sabbath." ☺ The idea is not just to cease working, but to focus one's time and effort on God on this day.
 - d) OK, here we go: Time for the discussion of Christians and the Sabbath.
 - i) Let's start with disclaimers: many good Christians have different views on this.
 - ii) Jesus said He is "Lord of the Sabbath". (Ref: Matthew 12:8, Luke 6:5). The idea is the purpose of the Sabbath is to have rest in God. Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of that rest. With our salvation comes a sense of peace because our eternal salvation I secured. That is also what Jesus meant when He said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28 NIV)
 - iii) Paul made a key comment on this: In discussing the Sabbath, Paul said, "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind." (Romans 14:5 NIV)
 - a) Paul's point is that some Christians set aside one day as the Sabbath and some consider every day the Sabbath as our lives is 100% dedicated to serving God in all that we do. Paul's other point is that this is "debate" and he is not going to solve it.
 - iv) Many Christians argue an observance of a separate full Sabbath day rest (apart from attending a Sunday service) is not necessary as Jesus is our "rest". You never

read anywhere in the New Testament of non-Jewish Christians being required to observe some sort of Sabbath ritual.

- v) There is also a practical aspect to the Sabbath: God wants to remind us that “time” belongs to Him. Let me explain this with an illustration. God asks us to donate part of our income to Him to show our trust in Him. By giving to our local church or other Christian causes we are saying to God in effect, “I don’t know where tomorrow’s income is going to come from, so I am going to trust You with part of today’s income as a sign of faith that You will provide for me tomorrow.”
 - a) That same attitude applies to time. Let’s face it, we could make more money if we worked all weekend. By stopping work to focus on God, it is a reminder that “time” belongs to Him. We show our recognition of that fact by giving God part of our time and trust in the fact He will provide for us despite the fact we are giving Him part of our precious time.
- vi) Another purpose of a Sabbath is to take some time off to get spiritually “recharged”. Just as sleep physically refreshes us, spending time with other Christians worshipping God refreshes us spiritually. That is also why God ordains “special days” (i.e., the title of this lesson) as well as weekly Sabbaths.
- vii) As to which day is “our” Sabbath, let’s just say Christians have been debating this for over 2,000 years and I’m not going to solve that debate. ☺ If one has to work on weekends, then one should take off a weekday for some sort of worship service. Most Christians go to church on Sundays as Jesus was resurrected on a “Sunday”. I don’t have problem with those who go on a Saturday or a weekday or everyday. Like Paul said, “Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind”. The point is God desires we “rest in Him” and how the dedicated Christian should observe some sort of Sabbath rest is up to that individual.

7. Verse 4: “These are the LORD’s appointed feasts, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times:

- a) Notice that only one verse is dedicated to the weekly Sabbath. That was Verse 3.
- b) There are 39 verses dedicated to the other seven “special” feasts. The reason Verse 3 is included as God wants to consider the weekly Sabbath in the same “take time off for God” category as the seven holidays we are about to describe, beginning in Verse 5.
- c) As to Verse 4, this is the overview statement that describes these seven feasts.

8. Verse 5: The LORD’s Passover begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month.

- a) Of all the Jewish holidays, the most famous is Passover. It only gets one sentence here because a whole chapter in Exodus (Chapter 12) describes how to observe this holiday.
- b) God is saying in effect here, “Remember that Passover holiday I described to you back in Exodus 12? Let me just remind you that those decrees are still in effect and I don’t want you to forget that holiday along with the others I’m going to describe in this chapter”.
- c) If you asked me to play word association with “Passover”, my answer is “redemption”.
 - i) If someone gave me a check for some money, that check is technically “worthless” as a piece of paper. It is only valuable when it is taken to the bank and exchanged for cash money. That action is called “redemption” as I am redeeming what was promised to me when I first received that bank check.
 - ii) God calling the Israelites out of Egypt was an act of redemption. To recap the events of the original Passover, God said in effect, “I’m going to kill the firstborn son of every family. In order to be saved from this tragedy, one has to smear lambs blood on the doorpost of one’s house. If you do that, one is spared.”
 - iii) The redemption is the “sparing” of the life of the believer. The purpose for the Israelite to observe the Passover every year is to remember this event. The Israelites were spared their lives due to the shed blood of innocent animals.

- d) Jesus himself celebrated Passover. That was “The last supper” event. Jesus instituted communion at a Passover dinner. Jesus associated the bread that is part of the Passover ritual with his body being “broken” for the forgiveness of sins.
 - i) Paul said, “For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.” (1st Cor. 5:7 NIV).
 - ii) My point here is that Passover is prophetic of Jesus payment of our sins. Just as the Israelites were spared death by smearing lamb’s blood on their doorposts, so are we spared eternal damnations by accepting Jesus’ blood payment for our sins.
 - iii) This brings up the issue of prophecy. Prophecy is not just predictions but it is also “patterns”. You cannot find a quote in the Old Testament that says, “The Passover is a prediction of what the Messiah will do one day”. One has to understand that bible stories are often “patterns” that apply to the events of Jesus’ life.
 - e) Let’s get back to the verse: Chapter 12 of Exodus gives all sorts of details of how the Israelites are to commemorate the Passover event. The only instruction given here in Verse 5 is that the event is to take place on the 14th day of the first month.
 - i) The idea is the event is always to take place on a specific day. It is like the American holiday “4th of July”. No deviation from that specific date is permitted.
 - f) This is probably a good time to give a quick explanation of the Jewish calendar:
 - i) The Jewish calendar is based on a lunar cycle. They’re year is a little shorter than the solar 365 day year. Occasionally they add an extra month to catch up.
 - ii) The Jewish new year is in the fall. Passover is in the spring. Verse 5 says, “in the first month” which is springtime. It is confusing because the fall new years is used to start a new year. For example, if it is the Jewish year “5767” (as it is when this is written), the next year of “5768” begins on New Year’s Day in the fall.
 - iii) At the same time, the “spring new year” is used to calculate the appropriate holidays. In order to calculate “when” the Passover date is one starts with a spring new year. At the same time, the actual new-year is in the fall. Confused? Welcome to the club. ☺ That is the way it works.
 - g) I also want to touch upon the four seasons (spring, summer, etc.) and the holidays.
 - i) When one thinks of spring, one thinks of new life in nature. Trees and plants bud new leaves this time of the year.
 - ii) It is an appropriate time of year to celebrate Passover. The Passover celebration is one of “new life” because one is spared from death. It is an “appropriate pun” in that Easter is celebrated in the spring as it is a reminder of our new life in Christ.
 - iii) As we go through all seven of these holidays, we’ll see how the time of the year (i.e., the seasons) are appropriate for when these holidays are celebrated.
 - h) So, do Christians have to celebrate Passover? As I stated in the introduction, no.
 - i) With that said, I always recommend that if a Christian gets the opportunity, go to a Passover dinner (called a “Seder”). Many Jewish-Christian groups and churches also have Seder dinners and show the symbolism behind the events and traditions. My point is if one gets an opportunity to go to one, take that opportunity.
 - i) OK, on to Holiday #2:
9. Verse 6: On the fifteenth day of that month the LORD's Feast of Unleavened Bread begins; for seven days you must eat bread made without yeast. ⁷ On the first day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work. ⁸ For seven days present an offering made to the LORD by fire. And on the seventh day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work.' "
- a) The second holiday is called the “Feast of Unleavened Bread”. It starts the day after Passover. Like Passover, there is no deviation from the date.
 - b) The specifics of the holidays are given in these verses: It is a 7-day long holiday. Day #1 and Day #7 are to be special no-work-allowed Sabbaths. Remember Day #1 is the 15th day of the month. Whatever day of the week it falls on, it becomes a no-work Sabbath.

- i) For the seven days, no leaven may be eaten by any Israelite. Further, the high priests are to make (sin) offerings every day for the Israelites.
 - c) OK, what's going on here and why should I care? ☺
 - i) Let's start with the fact the holiday is to begin the day after Passover.
 - ii) The Passover holiday represents our redemption, as God spared us from "everlasting death" by the shed blood of the "innocent lamb of God".
 - iii) What's the next step after we are "saved"? To purge ourselves of sin.
 - a) Leaven, also known as yeast is a word-picture of sin. This substance is added to bread to make it rise. Leaven or yeast is also what makes bread go bad after a few days. The word picture is "it corrupts by puffing up".
 - b) Leaven or yeast in itself is not bad, just as a word-picture. The word picture of leaven representing sin is common throughout the bible. Even Jesus said to "Beware of the leaven of Pharisees and Sadducees". (Matthew 16:6, et.al.) Without getting into the specifics of what Jesus meant, notice that Jesus used leaven as a word association with sin. The disciples knew that the term leaven had that negative word association.
 - d) Now let's get back to my association of holidays with the time of year they are celebrated:
 - i) Both Passover and The Feast of Unleavened Bread are celebrated in the spring. The spring is associated in nature with new life. We have our new life in Jesus. Once we have that new life, what do we do now? The answer is God works through us to change us and conform us to His image. In other words, we begin to change and remove the sin from our lives.
 - a) Paul said, "Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened." (1st Corinthians 5:7 NKJV).
 - ii) The holiday is seven days long as the number "seven" is associated with completion. God rested on Day 7 as He completed His creation work. (Genesis 2:2-3) The idea is to associate "the complete removal of sin from our lives".
 - e) Remember also that I stated that each holiday ties to Jesus as a "pattern".
 - i) The Passover is pretty blunt as a prediction because the New Testament calls Jesus "our Passover Lamb" (1st Corinthians 5:7). With that said, how does this 7-day feast tie to Jesus? The answer is His burial. If the death on the cross is our Passover lamb being slaughtered for us, than his burial is "the next step".
 - a) One can say, "Jesus was only dead for 3 days. This is a seven-day event. I don't get the connection." Remember that seven-days represented a "perfect" time frame. The idea is that Jesus died sinless. He was the perfect sacrifice for our sins. His sinless death was perfect.
 - ii) If you think I'm stretching the imagination here, note that Passover is definitely associated with Jesus payment for our sins and the third holiday coming up in the next verse is definitely associated with Jesus resurrection. In-between Jesus' payment for our sins and His resurrection is His "perfect death". That is why this holiday is prophetically tied to His death. The purpose of this seven-day Jewish holiday is to "perfectly" remove all sin from our life. The purpose of Jesus' death is to perfectly remove all sin from our life.
 - f) What is interesting is a Jewish custom of the father of the house to hide some leaven around the house to be cleaned out for this holiday. The child who finds the leaven will often get some sort of prize. It is roughly the Jewish equivalent of the "Easter egg hunt".
 - i) In fact, the term "spring cleaning" has its roots in this holiday. Jewish people would clean the house of any leaven prior to this holiday.
 - g) OK, onto Holiday #3: this is called "Firstfruits".
10. Verse 9: The LORD said to Moses, ¹⁰ "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: `When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first

grain you harvest. ¹¹ He is to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath.

- a) Let's start with when this holiday is celebrated "The day after the Sabbath" (Verse 11).
 - i) The next question is "What Sabbath is God talking about?"
 - ii) To explain the answer, first understand that when the Israelites enter the Promised Land, they will be dependant upon that land for food. The grain that first appears in the springtime is the barley grain. When the grain is fully budded and ready to be harvested, this "special day" is to be the first day after the "regular" Sabbath when the grain is ready. In other words, God does not want a normal Sabbath day to be this holiday. It is to be a special day associated with this holiday event.
 - iii) Even though it is not stated in the text, this holiday is celebrated right after Passover. It is usually the day after the next regular Sabbath after the Passover. It occurs sometime "in the middle" of the 7-day feast of unleavened bread.
- b) Why is this holiday called "firstfruits"? I thought it had to do with offering the first of the grain harvest. A grain is not a fruit.
 - i) This same holiday is called "firstfruits" in Exodus 23:16. The idea is the "fruit of our labor", and not literal fruit. One labors in the fields to plant seeds and watch them grow. The benefit is when the harvest comes. Again, the term "fruit" refers to the fruit (benefit) of one's labor, not to a literal fruit item.
- c) The idea of this holiday is about trusting God.
 - i) The holiday is when the first grain crop appears in the spring. Some of that crop is combined as a sheaf. That sheaf is given to God. Like the other ideas of giving, it has to do with faith. It is saying to God, "I trust in You so much I'm giving You the first thing the land produces each year to trust that You will provide for us for the rest of year." The same way we give of the first of our income as a sign of trust (faith), is the same way the Israelites gave the first of its produce.
- d) Again, all three of these holidays were celebrated as one long event. In the English language, Christmas and New Year's holidays are collectively called "the Holidays". By the time of Jesus, it was common to have a single nickname for these three holidays as they were close together. My point is in the New Testament there are a few references to the Feast of Unleavened Bread. That term became a collective term to describe all three holidays the same way "The Holidays" is an English language cliché.

11. Verse 12: On the day you wave the sheaf, you must sacrifice as a burnt offering to the LORD a lamb a year old without defect, ¹³ together with its grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil--an offering made to the LORD by fire, a pleasing aroma--and its drink offering of a quarter of a hin of wine. ¹⁴ You must not eat any bread, or roasted or new grain, until the very day you bring this offering to your God. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live.

- a) Here we get some more details of what is to be done on this 3rd holiday. On the same day the sheaf of barley is to be offered, there are other sacrifices to be given. (The word "barley" is never mentioned in the text. In terms of agriculture, it is the first grain crop that comes up in the spring. Therefore, it is assumed to be the type of crop being discussed.)
- b) Verse 14 states that no one may eat of any of the new crop until this offering is made to God. The text specifies different ways the new crop can be eaten (bread, roasted, etc.). The idea is to avoid any possible loopholes. ☺
- c) As I've stated many times in these Leviticus studies, you just can't make through a lesson without a visit to our old friend, the sacrificial barbeque pit. Here we have another of those references.
- d) The first offering mentioned in Verse 12 is a "burnt offering" as first discussed back in Chapter 1. The idea is one of "full commitment". The whole animal is burnt up. The reason a burnt offering is done here is Israel is saying collectively, "Now (when) we are in

- the Promised Land, we as a nation want to remain committed to serving God. We remember that commitment by offering the first of our produce. We also remember that commitment by collectively repeating the sin offering of a single lamb.”
- e) The second one mentioned is a “grain offering”. This ties to Leviticus Chapter 2. The offering is similar to the “first-fruit” (i.e., first grain) offering in that it is designed to show “continual commitment”. The difference between this offering and the burnt offering is that this grain offering shows continual commitment. It is to say in effect, “I have made the decision to commit my life to you via a burnt offering. To continue that commitment, I give part of my substance (e.g., earnings) to show my regular commitment to You”.
- f) Finally, Verse 13 mentions a “drink offering”. This is not described in Leviticus as a specific offering, but the mention of a drink offering is common throughout the writings of Moses from Exodus to Deuteronomy. Even Paul at one time compares the giving of his life as a “drink offering”. (Ref.: Philippians 2:17; 2nd Timothy 4:6.) The idea is to give “all of one’s self” in a physical effort to God. Just like a liquid from a cup poured on the sacrificial offer is how one pours out all of their life to God.
- g) Let me explain how it holiday ties to Jesus himself: Remember this event takes place on the day after the “regular Sabbath” after this holiday season began. In other words, if one starts with Passover, this event happens the day after the regular Sabbath after Passover. If the Jewish Passover was prior to a “Saturday”, then this even would be the first “Sunday” after Passover. The New Testament says Jesus rose from the dead on the first day after the Sabbath. (See Matthew 28:1.)
- i) Jesus was resurrected on “Firstfruits”. The same day Jesus resurrected, was the same day the first of the new grain was being offered to God. This holiday in roughly 32 AD fell on the same day Jesus was resurrected.
- ii) Now look at what Paul said, “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” (1st Cor. 15:20 NKJV).
- iii) Paul is associating Jesus’ resurrection with the term “firstfruits”. He became the first resurrected to heaven. Jesus taught that others who are saved before Him were in a “nice holding tank”, ☺ (Ref.: Luke 16:22-23) until Jesus was resurrected first. Since Jesus was the first to be resurrected, He is called our “firstfruits”.
- iv) This gets back to the predictions (prophecy) in the form of patterns. Nowhere in the Old Testament does it say that the holiday firstfruits is tied to the resurrection of Jesus. Paul understood that bible predictions are also in the form of patterns and the word-pictures of “firstfruits” do tie to Jesus’ resurrection.
- v) For what it is worth, there is an ancient Jewish school of thought that argues that “prophecy is also pattern”. While Orthodox Jews don’t believe Jesus is the Messiah, at the same time, many recognize “patterns” are a form of prophecy.
- h) So, how does this holiday apply to my life? The answer is “trust”.
- i) Remember that this is a holiday that occurred in the springtime. The first of the grains were beginning to bud. One had to trust in God that say, bad weather does not occur later or thieves don’t steal the crop. To give the first of one’s grain to God is to say one trusts in God to provide for the remainder of the harvest.
- ii) God asks Christians to apply the same principal of “trust Me”. It is to tell God in some way, by some gesture, “Lord, I am trusting You to provide for me later. As a toke of my trust in You, let me give you the first of my earnings to show my appreciation in how You will provide for me later.”
- i) This would be a good opportunity to discuss Christians and “tithing”.
- i) The word tithing is to give ten percent of one’s “net” earnings. That would be one’s take home paycheck or one’s net earnings after true business deductions, not one’s personal expenses. The New Testament does not require Christians to give ten percent. It is required in the law (See Numbers 18:26). Christians are not

- under “the law”. Paul and the other New Testament writers encouraged Christians to give, but never used the term “tithe” when discussing giving.
- ii) In other words, Christians should give. Christians are not required to tithe.
 - iii) Christians should give part of the first of their earnings to God as a gesture of trust, just like the Israelites gave the first of their earnings.
 - iv) Where should one give? One should support one’s local church. As to other Christian causes, it is like business investments: one looks for a good rate of return. Pick Christian causes where one can see a good “rate of return” and/or that cause is personally blessing one’s life. Support those causes in prayer as well!
- j) It is time to move on to Special Day #4: Pentecost.
12. Verse 15: “From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. ¹⁶ Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the LORD.
- a) Fifty days after “firstfruits”, this holiday is to be celebrated. The Hebrew name for this holiday is “Shevot” which means “weeks”. It is called “Shevot” as one has to count off seven full weeks plus one day to get to this holiday.
 - b) Christians know this Jewish holiday by its Greek name, “Pentecost”, which means “fifty”.
 - c) Christians associate this holiday with the birth of the church. In Acts Chapter 2, on this holiday, the Holy Spirit came down upon the early believers in the form of “tongues of fire” (Acts 2:3). Since then, this holiday is associated with the birth of the church.
 - d) The Jewish tradition is that this holiday is also associated with the birth of Judaism. This tradition is not found in the bible. They base it on the fact it was roughly 50 days after the Exodus that the 10 Commandments were given.
 - e) Keep this “anniversary” fact in mind as we read the next verse.
13. Verse 17: From wherever you live, bring two loaves made of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour, baked with yeast, as a wave offering of firstfruits to the LORD.
- a) Part of the ritual of Pentecost is that two loaves of bread made of a specific size (2/10 of an ephah of flour) were offered to God. (Don’t worry, there is no test question asking you how big is an “ephah”. ☺)
 - b) The two loaves of bread are given as a “wave” offering. That means they are waved back and forth between the altar and the priests. It is symbolic of “connection” between God and those desiring to serve God.
 - c) For many centuries commentators speculate as to “Why two loaves?” The most common Christian view is that it represents “Jews and Gentiles” as when the church was born on Pentecost, the wall of separation between those two groups was now broken.
 - i) I once heard a rabbi give a rebuttal to this theory: “If we Jews believed one of those two loaves represented the Gentiles, we would have dropped the loaf”. ☺
 - d) Now on to the strange part of this verse: This bread is to be made with yeast (leaven).
 - i) Here is a substance that is banned at other holidays. It is associated with sin. Yet, here on Pentecost, God specifically ordains the use of yeast or leaven (same thing).
 - ii) Commentators are full of speculation on this one. No answer is given in the text. Some think because yeast causes bread to rise, and Pentecost represents the “birth” of the church (and Judaism), it represents the growth of the religion. Others think it ties to the fact that it represents the last of the harvest and the “growth” of the harvest is represented in the yeast.
 - iii) The more likely theory is that leaven/yeast still represents sin. It is a metaphor that as the church grows, there is sin involved, as we are imperfect people. Jesus gave a parable in Mathew 13:33 where he compared Christians to “three measures of meal mixed with leaven”. Even though Jesus didn’t explain the parable, Jewish people understood leaven is associated with sin. Given that parable, I do believe the leaven/yeast reference here ties to sin.

14. Verse 18: Present with this bread seven male lambs, each a year old and without defect, one young bull and two rams. They will be a burnt offering to the LORD, together with their grain offerings and drink offerings--an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. ¹⁹ Then sacrifice one male goat for a sin offering and two lambs, each a year old, for a fellowship offering. ²⁰ The priest is to wave the two lambs before the LORD as a wave offering, together with the bread of the firstfruits. They are a sacred offering to the LORD for the priest. ²¹ On that same day you are to proclaim a sacred assembly and do no regular work. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live.
- a) Here are the rest of the ordinances to celebrate Pentecost. Essentially, everyone gets together and the bread is given as a "wave" offering. Also, a burnt offering is done (as a sign of vow-commitment to God), a grain offering (a sign of continual commitment) and a drink offering (to give one's physical "all") were done. Further, no one is to work and this is to be a Sabbath. Like the other holidays, it always falls on a specific date.
 - b) I'm not going to go into more detail about the different type of offerings, as I already covered that in a discussion of the last holiday. Our time is better spent discussing the symbolism and what God is trying to "accomplish" by this holiday.
 - i) First, it would help to have a little understanding about agriculture again. The first cereal crop to bud is barley. That is why the holiday is in the spring. The last crop to bud is wheat crop. It usually happens around the time of Pentecost.
 - ii) Therefore, one feast is given when the first crop starts to bud and another feast is given when the last crop starts to bud.
 - iii) Pentecost takes place in the spring, but it is now late spring and almost summer. Pentecost is saying in effect, "Lord, we are trusting you with all our provisions. We are trusting you with the first of our crops and the last of our crops. We are dedicating ourselves to serving You year round, but we offer these various sacrifices at these times to remind ourselves of our dependence upon You."
 - iv) A main purpose of all of these holidays is to show gratitude to God for the crops and to remind ourselves of our dependence to God to provide for the future.
 - c) It is important to understand that these feasts are not to manipulate God. The idea is not "OK, Lord, we have done everything as ordered, now You are under obligation to protect us." That is backwards thinking. The point is God already has decided to bless us. God has already decided to protect us. God has already decided to pour His love upon us. All we have to do is realize this and get on the train. These festivals are a sign of gratitude and realization of these facts.
 - i) Does this mean if we do all of these things nothing bad will ever happen? Of course not. I've yet to meet the most religiously devout person or the least one that hasn't gone through some suffering in their life. God allows suffering in our life in order to test us. We may not understand its purpose but God does.
 - ii) In order to cope with the life's problems, one needs to turn one's focus toward God and keep the eternal perspective on mind. When one realizes one is going to live forever, life's problems don't seem so bad. A purpose of these holidays is to get our focus upon God and remember that He is in charge for of lives and wants great things for us, now and forever. These feasts give us the opportunity to show our gratitude and remind ourselves of that wonderful, eternal future.
15. Verse 22: " `When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God.' "
- a) Here is one last comment about Pentecost: It ties back to something mentioned back in Chapter 19. The idea is when it is time for a harvest, part of the field is to be left alone so the poor could come and gather and eat from what was not harvested.

- b) Here in Verse 22, that principal is mentioned here with the feast of Pentecost. The connection is “trust”. We give the first of our crops to God in order to “trust” that He will provide for the future. At the same time, we are to leave part of our earnings for the poor, partially out of compassion and partially out of trust in the fact that God will provide.
 - i) It is God saying to us, “I have shown blessings upon you that you didn’t deserve. Go and do likewise for less fortunate.”
 - c) The reason this law is also mentioned here is Pentecost is a time of harvest. It therefore ties with the feast and events of Pentecost.
 - d) It’s time to move on to Holiday #5, which is in the fall:
16. Verse 23: The LORD said to Moses, ²⁴ "Say to the Israelites: `On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. ²⁵ Do no regular work, but present an offering made to the LORD by fire.' "
- a) Let’s back up a step: There are seven specific holidays given by Moses in the bible. All seven are summarized here in Chapter 23 of Leviticus. (The Jewish nation added a few more holidays later, but only these seven are “Moses-ordained”).
 - b) Of those holidays, three are in the spring, one is 50 days later (Pentecost) and the last three are in the fall. What we have here in Verse 23 is the first of the fall holidays.
 - c) With that said, this one doesn’t get much commentary. It just says that on the first day of the seventh month, the leaders are to blow horns, everyone must stop work for a day and offerings are to be made to God. When you read through the whole bible, there is very little reference to this holiday. It is commented upon a little more in Numbers 29:1-6 where Moses goes into a little more details about the offerings.
 - i) What is interesting is that the first day of every month is to be recognized by the blowing of a horn (“trumpet sound”) as described in Numbers 10:10.
 - d) So, what is so special about “this” day? Again, there is essentially no bible commentary as to its significance and it is rarely mentioned as a celebration throughout the bible.
 - i) For starters, consider the fact it is the first day of the “seventh” month. Again, the number seven is associated with perfection and completion as God rested on the 7th day. It is to recognize a time of completion.
 - ii) Another significance is that this is the fall. The time of harvesting crops is now over. Winter is coming. If you can think of a solar year as a day, the fall can represent “the end of the day”. It is time of year to trust God to provide for you through the “dark season” of one’s life until spring comes again.
 - iii) In the Jewish “civil” calendar, this is New Year’s day. Remember the Jewish day begins at sundown. Again, comparing a day to four-season year, the fall can be symbolic of “sundown”. It is still the 7th month on the “religious calendar”, but this is “Happy New Year” or “Rosh Hashanah” on the civil calendar.
 - iv) This holiday is also 10 days prior to the most important holiday of the year for the Jewish people, which is “Yom Kippur” or “The Day of Atonement”. We’ll discuss this holiday next. The “New Year’s horn blast” is a way of telling the Jewish people, “Hey everyone, the big day is coming up, get ready”.
 - e) I’ve discussed the fact the first three holidays tie to Jesus First Coming. Passover is associated with Jesus death, The Feast of Unleavened Bread is tied to His burial and Firstfruits is tied to His resurrection. Pentecost is tied to the birth of the church.
 - f) Because the first three are tied to Jesus first coming, many bible scholars believe the last 3 tie to the events of His Second Coming. Because that event is future, no one can say with any certainty of this theory. Still, I’ve met some people who hold off on long term planning during this time frame just in case Jesus decides to return during one of these feast days. ☺ Let me explain a little further:

- i) Some tie the feast of trumpets to the “rapture” of the church. I happen to disagree as Jesus said no one knows the day or hour of His return (Matthew 24:36, Mark 13:32) and that means the date is not predictable.
 - ii) The reason that theory is out there is because the holiday specifies the blowing of trumpets. There are two specific New Testament mentions of the rapture of the church. (That word is not in the bible as it comes from the Latin). In one of those two references, Paul uses the terms “the last trump” and “the trumpet will sound” (1st Corinthians 15:52) in describing Jesus’ return for His church. That is tied to the “trumpet blast” here in Leviticus 23:23. Again, if this is true, we’ll wait and see. Jesus said no one knows the day or hour, so I’ll take His word on it. ☺
 - iii) If this holiday does tie to some event of Jesus Second Coming, it will have something to do with a gathering of Jewish believers prior to that event. It will be a “Jewish New Year (era)”. We will wait and see for the details. ☺
17. Verse 26: The LORD said to Moses,²⁷ "The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present an offering made to the LORD by fire.²⁸ Do no work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the LORD your God.²⁹ Anyone who does not deny himself on that day must be cut off from his people.³⁰ I will destroy from among his people anyone who does any work on that day.³¹ You shall do no work at all. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live.³² It is a sabbath of rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. From the evening of the ninth day of the month until the following evening you are to observe your sabbath."
- a) Now we move on to Holiday #6: The Day of Atonement. We spent a whole chapter on this holiday back in Chapter 16. Chapter 16 emphasized the duties of the priest in this holiday. These verses here focus on the roles of all Israelites for this holiday.
 - b) Remember that the purpose of Chapter 23 is to tell all Israelites of “Special Days” they are to set aside for God. Enough detail is given here in Chapter 23 to stress the importance of this holiday without going into all the details already given in Chapter 16.
 - c) If you recall from Chapter 16, this is the holiday with the “two goats”. One goat is sacrificed for everyone’s sins. The sins of everyone are placed on the other goat and that goat is set free in the wilderness. It is symbolic of God freeing us of the guilt of our sins. Modern Judaism no longer kills goats. The emphasis today is on the confession of sins.
 - d) The emphasis here in Chapter 23 is what the Israelites are to do to prepare for the big “double-goat ceremony”. If you read these verses a few times, the main point God is saying in effect is, “Don’t do any work on this day because this day is especially important to Me. If you go to work, you’re not going to heaven. It’s your call!” ☺
 - e) What the Israelites must do on this day is to “deny themselves”. The idea is to focus on one’s sins and confess them. That term, called “afflict your souls” in the King James is used four times in Leviticus. The idea is “sin causes suffering and we are to be reminded of that fact”. Jewish tradition included various forms of self-affliction in order for one to focus on one’s sins. It is to remind ourselves how sin has hurt us and others around us.
 - f) Now let’s tie the holiday to the time of the year. It is fall. Winter is coming. The “dark season” is upon the Israelites. It is time to deal with the darkness of sin. The number “10” is associated with human perfection (e.g., 10 fingers, 10 toes). The number 7 is again, associated with God’s perfection. Thus, this holiday is on the 10th day of the 7th month. In order for us to achieve “perfection”, we need to be perfectly forgiven of all sins.
 - g) Again, scholars tie the three fall feasts to Jesus’ Second Coming. The common view is this holiday ties to the Jewish nation realizing they “blew it” about Jesus. There is a prediction of the Jewish nation mourning “for the one they have pierced” (Zech. 12:10). The point is some tie Zechariah’s prediction to this Day of Atonement holiday.

- h) Hang in there folks, we're down to the last holiday. The finish line is in sight! ☺
18. Verse 33: The LORD said to Moses, ³⁴ "Say to the Israelites: `On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the LORD's Feast of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days. ³⁵ The first day is a sacred assembly; do no regular work. ³⁶ For seven days present offerings made to the LORD by fire, and on the eighth day hold a sacred assembly and present an offering made to the LORD by fire. It is the closing assembly; do no regular work.
- a) The feast is called the "Feast of Tabernacles" in Verse 33. It is also known as the "Feast of Booths" and called "Sukkoth" in Hebrew. I'll explain this title more at Verse 42.
- b) Remember the 3rd holiday ("The Feast of Unleavened Bread") was a 7-day long event. Here, the 7th holiday ("Feast of Tabernacles") is also a seven-day long event. All the other special days are one-day events. Like Holiday #3, the first and last day is a Sabbath. Also like Holiday #3, offerings are to be made to God during this time frame.
19. Verse 37: ("`These are the LORD's appointed feasts, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies for bringing offerings made to the LORD by fire--the burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings required for each day. ³⁸ These offerings are in addition to those for the LORD's Sabbaths and in addition to your gifts and whatever you have vowed and all the freewill offerings you give to the LORD.)
- a) The NIV translation places these two verses in parenthesis. The idea is that these verses take a step back from discussing "Holiday #7" and focuses on all seven holidays. It is God saying in effect, "Before I discuss more details of Holiday #7, I've now mentioned all seven holidays. Remember to observe all of them and do the offerings as prescribed for each holiday".
- b) Each of the seven holidays require burnt offerings (to show one's commitment to serve God), grain offerings (to give of one's substance as a sign of one's continual commitment), and drink offerings (kind of like the cliché to "give one's all"). The idea is the priests are to do these various rituals on behalf of the entire nation to show their commitment.
- c) Verse 38 mentions "free-will" offerings. It is God saying in effect, "If you people, on your own, decide to go over and above My requirements to give additional offerings as a sign of one's dedication, that is great and I encourage that. However, don't ignore My basic requirements and say your "free-will" offerings count as my standard requirements."
- i) My loose translation: If you do something special as a sign of one's dedication to God, it doesn't mean you can get out going to church this Sunday." ☺ To use a reference from the board game "Monopoly", you can't use something special one has done as a "get out of jail free" card with God.
20. Verse 39: " `So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the LORD for seven days; the first day is a day of rest, and the eighth day also is a day of rest. ⁴⁰ On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. ⁴¹ Celebrate this as a festival to the LORD for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come; celebrate it in the seventh month. ⁴² Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths ⁴³ so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.'" "
- a) In these verses, we get the description of how this 7th holiday is to be celebrated. The Israelites live in portable "booths" for seven days. (Again, the Hebrew title for this holiday means "booths".) The idea is to get out of the house, construct some sort of structure made of tree branches in the back yard, and live in that structure for seven days.
- b) Camping in a tent for a few days is fun. After a few days, you start to miss your bed. That is the idea. It is the reminder that the Israelites had to wander in the desert for forty years prior to having "real homes" in the Promised Land. God wanted the Israelites to commemorate that event by living in "booths" for seven days.

- c) It is interesting to see some of the variations of this feast done today. In large apartment buildings in Jewish neighborhoods, they will often build these on their rooftops. The modern idea is to construct the shelters so that the wind can come through and one can see the sky. Jewish tradition allows exceptions if it is raining too hard.
- d) Verse 41 says it is a time of celebration. The idea is not, "Look how miserable I am living in this booth". The idea is God has rescued me from the life of slavery.
- i) Let me explain with a cliché: "It took the Israelites 40 days to get out of Egypt, but it took 40 years to get Egypt out of the Israelites". The symbolism is that once we are separated and "saved" from the world, God spends a lifetime cleaning us up from our sins and teaching us how to live His way and not the way of the world. The Promised Land represents the rich, full life of fully trusting God. Before one can get there, it "takes a lifetime" of "wandering through the desert in tents".
- ii) That is why this "tent" holiday is time of celebration. It is a reminder we no longer have to "dwell in tents" as we are saved for eternity. We have our "new home in Christ". We as Christians are saved for eternity. That promise is unconditional.
- iii) The reason this is the last of the seven holidays is it is a time to celebrate our common salvation. We are "rescued" from slavery (of sin) and brought into a new life. At the same time, God wants us to remember that we were once "slaves". The Israelites remembered that fact by living in tents. All God asks of Christians is that when we do sin, we realize God was right, we were wrong and confess it.
- e) The purpose of this holiday is stated in Verse 43: "So your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths". In other words, the story of salvation is to be passed on from generation to generation. It is the opposite of telling our children, "I'm saved, your life is your problem." ☺ The salvation message is to be passed on to the next generation.
- f) Now let's tie this holiday to the fall season: Verse 39 says this is to happen after all the crops have been gathered. That means God wants the Israelites to finish harvesting their crops prior to this holiday. This is a time for Israelites to gather together and celebrate "payday" as all the crops have been gathered. At the same time of celebrating, one must remember they were slaves at one time and God redeemed them. It is another way to remind ourselves, "Yes, we are blessed. Look at all of this great produce. At the same time we are not to pat ourselves on the back for all of our hard work, but to give thanks to God for providing for us in the first place."
- g) What about this holiday and the Jesus Second Coming stuff? Thanks for reminding me! ☺
- i) Some see this holiday as symbolic of the great gathering in heaven "after the harvest". Romans 11:25-26 says in effect that once all the Gentiles (any non-Jew) who will be saved are saved, then all of Israel will be saved. There are only "x" number of Gentiles in heaven. Once that number is reached, God focuses His attention on the Nation of Israel due to His unconditional promises to that nation. There has to be a "coming together after the harvest" by Jesus and His Second Coming. Commentators see this holiday as prophetically tying to that event.
21. Verse 44: So Moses announced to the Israelites the appointed feasts of the LORD.
- a) This verse is a historical note that Moses told everyone of these requirements. If Verse 44 was not included, people would wonder, "Well, if Moses wrote this down, how do we know that the people were actually aware of these laws?" Verse 44 is the answer.
22. I'm running long, so let me wrap up my final thoughts in my closing prayer: Father, we thank You for what these special days teach us about our relationship with You. Even though You don't require we observe these days, these holidays teach us about trusting You with our earnings, our future and faith and that You are always there in good times and in rough times. Like the Israelites, help us to take time off of our schedules to remind ourselves that You are always there for us and for us to show gratitude for that fact. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.