

The Eight “Appointed Times” of Yahweh to Meet with Israel A Study of Leviticus 23

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The Background of this Study

To understand where we are with understanding Leviticus 23 for today as followers of the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua), and why it poses an issue within the culture of Western Christianity, we should review briefly the historical stages that brought us to this point.

For the first three centuries, including the first century, the Jewish Nazarene Movement scattered throughout the world—from Jerusalem to the coastlands of the Mediterranean Sea as far as North Africa and beyond to India. These Jewish disciples of the Messiah focused on making disciples of Jews and Gentiles. Two names given to the Jewish followers of the Messiah was “the Way” (Acts 19:23) and “the Nazarene sect” (Acts 24:5), among whom was listed the Apostle Paul.

Though often persecuted and out of government favor, they in effect changed the world with the good news of the kingdom of God revealed in the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua). Leviticus 23 was taught and practiced as part of the illustrative teachings they shared from the Torah, Prophets (*Nevi'im*) and Writings (*Ketuvim*) to disclose the teachings of the apostolic movement as true about the Messiah. These Nazarenes observed the Sabbath and the seven annual “appointed times” (*mo'edim*).

In the mid-second century, the Nazarene Movement began to be supplanted by the incursion of a persistent ideology birthed in the Greek stables of philosophy. Though it would take another 150 years and longer to secure its iron-fisted control, the philosophical ideals of Neo-Platonism restructured the Gospel movement of the first century and early second century into what would become the Greco-Roman Church, first in Constantinople and later in Rome.

Until his death mid-way through the first century, the Apostle Paul contended with this alien ideology from Athens. It contaminated the congregations of Corinth and other cities where gentiles became a larger part of the Jewish congregations. After his death, gentiles taught the Greco-Roman philosophy increased their resistance to the Hebraic foundation of Judean Nazarene faith.

The issue was troubling to Tertullian near the end of the third century. In seeing the paradigm shift from the Judean, Hebraic faith to Greek philosophy and language, he asked the probing question of his time:

What indeed has Athens [Platonic and Aristotelian thought] to do with Jerusalem [Jewish Hebraic thought]? What concord is there between the Academy [of Athens] and the Church? What between [philosophical] heretics and Christians? Our instruction comes from ‘the porch of Solomon,’ who had himself taught that ‘the Lord should be sought in simplicity of heart.’ Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition! We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus, no inquisition after enjoying the gospel! With our faith, we desire no further belief.¹

¹ Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum*, chapter 7.
http://www.tertullian.org/works/de_praescriptione_haereticorum.htm. Retrieved April 28, 2013.

His question did not deter the advance of Neo-Platonic philosophy in shaping the warp and woof of the Church.

Eventually, Neo-Platonic theology won the day. Those adhering to the core beliefs of the first century Nazarenes—including the observance of Sabbath and the seven annual “Appointed Times” were anathematized.

By the fifth century if a Jewish believer was to remain in the gentile-led Church, he or she must deny and denounce their Jewishness altogether and convert to gentile Christianity, or be banished, starved out or killed. At the heart of it was the observance of the Sabbath and the “appointed times” of Leviticus 23.

Any Jewish person who believes in the Messiah Jesus was anathema to the Church. An oath of renunciation of “all things Jewish”, including home and family, was required to join the body of gentile Christians, under enforcement by the bishop of Constantinople:

“I renounce all customs, rites, legalisms, unleavened breads and sacrifices of lambs of the Hebrews, and all the other feasts [i.e., “appointed times”] of the Hebrews, sacrifices, prayers, aspirations, purifications, sanctifications, and propitiations, and fasts and new moons, and Sabbaths, and superstitions, and hymns and chants, and observances and synagogues.

Absolutely everything Jewish, every Law, rite and custom and if afterwards I shall wish to deny and return to Jewish superstition, or shall be found eating with Jews, or feasting with them, or secretly conversing and condemning the Christian religion instead of openly confuting them and condemning their vain faith, then let the trembling of Cain and the leprosy of Gehazi cleave to me, as well as the legal punishments to which I acknowledge myself liable. And may I be an anathema in the world to come, and may my soul be set down with Satan and the devils.”²

What a tragic reversal! Whereas the argument in Acts 15 concerned the admission of gentiles into the community of Judean faith in the Messiah, by the fifth century the argument flip-flopped to concern itself with the admission of Jewish believers in the Messiah into the Neo-Platonic faith of emergent Catholicism. To this day, the pendulum has never swung back in favor of the Judean, Hebraic persuasion of the Bible. It remains Greco-Roman.

As a result of its accumulative history of antagonism towards the Jews and Messianic Jews, Leviticus 23 remains invalidated by the organized Church as does the fourth commandment of the Ten Commandments.

Though by no means the first occasion, during the nineteenth century, a loosely scattered and relatively small body of Christians in Europe and North America began to give serious interest in studying and reclaiming the seven annual “appointed times” of Yahweh (popularly called “feasts”) recorded in

² Stefano Evodius Assemani, editor and translator. *Acta Sanctorum Martyrum Orientalium at Occidentalium: Eastern and Western Martyrdom Texts in Syriac*, Syriac Studies Library 43, Vol. 1, (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, from the 1748 Rome edition), 105.

Leviticus 23. It was part of a wider emphasis on the overall Messianic appeal of the Old Testament (also known as the Tanakh) to reveal the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua).

At the time, a general interest lay in identifying Messianic prophecies in the Scriptures. The “feasts” or “festivals” were significant for the study of the life of Jesus (Yeshua) of Nazareth. In particular, Jewish believers in the Messiah sought to explain the prophetic “appointed times” of Leviticus 23 for the purpose of Jewish evangelism and the reclamation of Jesus (Yeshua) as Jewish. For example, in some paintings of the conjectured Christ he was painted as blue-eyed and blond-haired—anything but Jewish.

Some gentile believers in the Messiah, likewise, felt “biblically awakened” by the writings of such Jewish Christian teachers as Alfred Edersheim (1825-1889). His most famous work was *The Life and Times of Jesus*, though he wrote other books to recover and reclaim the biblical Hebraic worldview of the Bible.

During the late nineteenth century the study of the Hebrew language was revitalized among Jewish people, including many Gentile Christian scholars. Many agreed that something of great import was at work to affirm Jewish life and restore the Jewish people to their homeland in what became known as Palestine.

Awareness of the Jewish plight in Europe awakened the national conscience of many Christians in the United Kingdom. It resulted in political advocacy for a Jewish homeland. After the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, the United Kingdom acted favorably to establish a national homeland for the Jewish people in present-day Israel. The Jewish Zionist Movement was historically significant to Israel’s national rebirth along with the United Kingdom’s support. Zionism remains a volatile political subject today among gentile Christians with some denominations, especially of the Reformed Protestant Church movement, rejecting its premise of a homeland for the Jewish people as legitimate.

During this time a chorus of voices arose self-described as Bible prophecy teachers in some evangelical and Pentecostal circles. They emphasized God’s plan for Israel and the nations in sharp contrast to Catholic and Reformed “replacement theology” positions, the prevailing view within mainline Protestantism. These new voices advocated that Israel still matters in God’s plan for the ages. They connected with many conservative Christians who held a high view of the inspiration of Scriptures. The Pentecostal movement of churches in the United Kingdom and the United States of America were particularly influenced by the prophetic movement to recognize the Jewish people and Israel’s homeland desires as biblically legitimate.

In the Assemblies of God between the 1920s to the early 1940s the most significant Bible teacher was Meyer Pearlman, a Jewish scholar who is regarded today as “the first systematic theologian of the Assemblies of God.” His remarkable completion of his Jewish faith in the Messiah would have been unacceptable in most churches other than the Assemblies of God at the time. He recognized Israel’s legitimacy as a state as well as the right of Jewish believers to remain Jewish believers. Because of his influence, the Assemblies of God’s Statement of Fundamental Truths contains the word “Israel” in it, the only church body to do so of any size.

Of the several books he wrote, occasionally citing Jewish people in his narratives, was the title, *Knowing the Doctrines of the Bible*. The last reprint was in 1981. For decades it was a college textbook, and later, required reading in Assemblies of God Bible colleges around the world.

He wrote on the Messiah Jesus as the fullness of the Torah and did not ignore the fourth commandment of the Ten Commandments nor Leviticus 23. In fact, at times he taught classes at Central Bible College where he taught the Bible wearing the garments of the High Priest of ancient Israel to illustrate the importance of the Old Testament in understanding the New Testament.

During his shortened life due to disease he taught hundreds of Pentecostal ministerial students to view the legitimacy of the Jewish people as God's covenant people. He died in 1943, five years before Israel was reconstituted as a nation by the recognition of the United Nations.

Another Assemblies of God pioneer who was of Orthodox Jewish faith and thoroughly knowledgeable of the Hebrew Scriptures was Meyer Tan-Ditter (1896-1962), one of the Pentecostal Movement's early missionaries to the Jewish people.

Though Myer Pearlman died in 1943, Meyer Tan-Ditter and other Pentecostal Jewish believers in the Messiah bore witness as Pentecostal pioneers to the reestablishment of the nation of Israel in 1948.

After the establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948, a flurry of prophetic teachers arose, especially among the Assemblies of God and other Pentecostal fellowships. They spread their heightened message about Israel and the Last Days. Their heyday was roughly a forty year period from the 1950s through the 1980s. Most of their prophetic teachings followed a dispensational line of reasoning fostered during the 19th century, based more upon gentile rather than Jewish hermeneutics. As a result, they placed less emphasis on the "appointed times" of Yahweh in Leviticus 23 and much more on interpreting Ezekiel, Daniel and the Book of Revelation. The overall goal was evangelism of gentiles, not the Jewish people.

During this same time period Jewish-led groups arose among some evangelical and Pentecostal churches, mostly the latter. Again, Pentecostal Jews were prominent within this group. Generally, the groups were loosely connected. If the Jewish-led ministry was not led by a completed Jew, it was comprised of people who had some Jewish connection in their family line. Their burden of concern was, like the Apostle Paul's, the salvation of Israel (Romans 10:1; Acts 28).

Such a group was and is the Rock of Israel, a Pentecostal Jewish ministry based in Cincinnati, Ohio. Since its beginning its objective is to evangelize Jewish people in North America. It is Assemblies of God in background and led by ordained Assemblies of God ministers.

These "Jewish-type" groups emphasize the "appointed times" of Leviticus 23 as part of Bible prophecy to reveal the Jewish Messiah. Besides Leviticus 23, particular emphasis is placed on Isaiah 53 and other Messiah-centric passages from the Torah, Prophets and Writings (the Old Testament). Their teachers appeal to Jewish people to receive the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua) using familiar Hebrew and traditional Jewish concepts. No biblical concept is more familiar to the Jews than the eight "appointed times" Yahweh set to meet with his covenant people Israel.

The Assemblies of God has a National Jewish Fellowship that emphasizes Jewish evangelism. The eight "appointed times" are prominent in its endeavors to teach the Jewish people about the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua). A familiar and popular illustrated teaching is the Passover Seder Meal held in many Assemblies of God congregations today, mostly led by Assemblies of God "rabbis".

The Assemblies of God had done the world a great service in allowing for the expression of Jewish believers to worship God and celebrate their salvation through faith in the Messiah Jesus without

requiring Jews to denounce their heritage, the Torah, or its Hebraic teachings. In doing so, it has gone against the traditional Catholic and Protestant teachings that replace Israel with the Church.

Martin Luther, the famous Reformer, like the Catholic Church from which he came, denounced the Jews, publicly decrying their existence. He wished to expunge the Letter of James (Jacob) from the Bible because of it was too Jewish. He considered Jews evil second only to Satan. No wonder the Lutheran Church in Germany was complicit in the evil acts of Adolf Hitler against the Jewish people.

Hopefully, with the rise of the Assemblies of God, a powerful Pentecostal voice is heard from within the Church that advocates for the Jewish people and the right of existence for the Jewish people. Thanks to Jewish pioneers like Myer Pearlman in the formation of the fundamental teachings of the Assemblies of God, Jewish believers have a safe haven to express their dynamic faith as Jewish people alongside gentile Christians.

The Purpose of this Study

In light of this, the importance of Leviticus 23 cannot be stressed more. It is foundational to the expression of the Jewish people, those who believe and do not yet believe in the Messiah Jesus as the eternal Son of God and Son of Man.

This paper is written as an exegesis of Leviticus 23 to help explain the text in its Hebraic context. It is written for the benefit of Jewish people to know that they have an advocate within the Church. For those Jewish believers in the Messiah, it is designed to help them with a layout of the literary structure of the eight “appointed times” to assist in Jewish evangelism and education.

It may serve a dual purpose as well in helping those among us who are gentile Christians, especially those who are Spirit-filled, to better understand these instructions (*toroth*) that were given to Israel as a nation to observe Yahweh’s presence among them. The command of the Messiah to take his gospel of the kingdom to the Jew first, and also to the Gentiles, is held up as the goal of this study.

A Basic Introduction to the Torah

The first five books of the Bible is known as the Torah. Torah means “Instruction”—the instruction of Yahweh to Israel, his covenant nation. The middle book of the Torah is the Book of Leviticus, otherwise known in the Hebrew Bible as *Torath Kohanim* (“Instructions of the Priests”). The Torah is the first of four major biblical units of the Bible. The other three are the Prophets (*Nevi'im*), the Writings (*Ketuvim*) and the Judean Nazarene Writings (*Ketuvim*).

Leviticus 23 is one of the “instructions” for priests and for all the people of Israel. It was written for the sake and benefit of all Hebrew people.

The Torah is the original Bible before any other books or sections were added by the Holy Spirit-inspired writers of Israel. They were understood to have written “the very words of God” in two major literary forms—narrative (*haggadah*) and legal statements (*halakha*).

The Messiah Jesus (Yeshua) called these five books the Torah. English translators render it as “Law”, a term that found wide acceptance among ancient Jewish Greek-speaking people passed down to today’s generation (cf. Tobit 6:12 (LXX Apocrypha); Matthew 5:17).

Meanwhile, the Torah should be understood as the backbone of the Bible. All the books of the Bible that follow expand from the Torah and refer back to it for orientation. It was the compass that guided the rest of the books when they were written by holy men of old. The prophets of Israel called Israel to return to the Torah—the ancient landmark. From the Torah they looked forward to Israel’s future pending conditions being met in obedience or disobedience. Jesus (Yeshua) of Nazareth appealed to the books of the Torah and Prophets as being so permanent that they endure as long as the heavens and the earth exist (*cf.* Matthew 5:17-18).

In the top ten list of most quoted books of the Tanakh (the Old Testament) as found in the New Testament, removing all allusions and inferences (which are in the hundreds), the Torah is quoted 123 times. The Prophets are quoted 72 times, and the Writings 76 times. In the Torah, Deuteronomy is most frequently quoted (44 times), followed by Genesis (35 times), Exodus (31 times) and Leviticus (13 times). Numbers (*Bamidbar*) is not quoted directly.

With this brief introduction to the Torah and its importance for the whole of the Bible, we turn to the middle book of the Torah—the Books of Leviticus (*Vayikra*).

The Book of Leviticus (*Vayikra*)

Whereas Genesis and Exodus are mostly narrative, as is the same for Numbers and Deuteronomy (Moses’ speeches), Leviticus is mostly commandments regarding the order and functions of how the priests conduct their work. Thus it is priestly in character and should be understood thusly.

Amidst the many commandments that guide the priesthood, a couple of narratives (*haggadah*) appear. The first is the dedication of the Tent of Meeting (the *Mishkan*) followed immediately by the strange fire offering of two of Aaron’s sons, both priests, that flamed beyond control and consumed them (Leviticus 8-10). The other narrative is found in Leviticus 24:10-23 where an Israelite woman’s son whose father was an Egyptian blasphemed the name of Yahweh. He was judged before the camp of Israel and stoned to death.

Otherwise, the whole of the book are commandments governing Israel’s life and behavior from the perspective of the priesthood, its concerns and interests.

Narrowing down our focus from these broader topics, we are ready to look more closely at Leviticus 23.

The Eight Appointed Times of Israel

Leviticus 23 is a book of *halakha*—commandments for Israel as a nation to observe. The noun *halakha* is derived from the Hebrew verb *halak* which means “to walk”. *Halakha*, then, is a body of instructions of how Israel is “to walk” before Yahweh in observance of his commands as the one true God, Creator of the universe, and Lord of all. The book being priestly in character, it affects not only how priests “walk” through life, but also all Israel in respect to walking before God in regard to these *halakha*.

The eight “appointed times” are *halakha*. They instruct the priests, but in a broader sense all Israel in regard to them.

To understand the eight “appointed times” (*mo’edim*) in the Torah that Yahweh chose for Himself “to meet with Israel”, Leviticus 23 offers the most succinct summary in the Bible. Of the eight “appointed times” listed, one is to be observed weekly, namely, the Sabbath, and the other seven are to be observed as annual convocations of Israel. All eight are referred to as Yahweh’s “appointed times” to meet with Israel.

By minimizing the use of the plural terms “feasts” and “festivals” as popular descriptions of these annual events and, instead, referring to them by their biblical attribution as “appointed times” (*mo’edim*), we may demonstrate better the purpose and effect of these convocations which Yahweh chose for Israel. In the long range, this helps us feel something of the fabric and texture of the ancient biblical Hebrew narratives in their pristine settings.

The eight key events signaled by Yahweh as to when He would meet with his covenant people are:

Fifty-two Weekly: unrelated to the position of the moon

- Sabbath (*Shabbath*)

Seven Annually (in order): All associated with the position of the moon

1. Passover (*Pesach*)
2. Unleavened Bread (*Chag haMatzah*)
3. Firstfruits (*Bikkurim; Reishith*)
4. Day of Pentecost (*Yom Shavuoth*)
5. Day of Trumpet Blast (*Yom Teruah*)
6. Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur/Yom ha-Kippurim*)
7. Festival of Booths (*Chag Sukkoth*)

Abraham’s Legacy: the Missional, Redemptive Purpose of Yahweh in Israel’s “Appointed Times”

By extension, these eight weekly and annual events are not isolated from Israel’s history. They are an expression of it, each critical to the life of Israel as the covenant people of God. Each “appointed time” has a missional, redemptive purpose for Israel to bring about the blessing of the nations as promised to Abraham (*cf.* Genesis 12:1-3). In fact, this is the grand context for observance of the “appointed times”. As the prophet Isaiah said, “Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who brought you forth,” even so we should look to this patriarchal family of Israel’s origin to understand the purpose and mission of Yahweh’s “appointed times” with Israel (*cf.* Isaiah 51:2).

Though it may be obvious that the “appointed times” may not be separated from Israel, in fact, they may not be separated from the mission of Israel to “repair the world” (*tiqqun ‘olam*) in righteous and justice either. This mission is Yahweh’s mission. Israel’s objective is to represent and reflect Yahweh’s ultimate desire for the nations to be redeemed from idolatry and rebellion against Him (*cf.* Genesis 18:16-19). Hence, to look back to Abraham and Sarah is rather essential to comprehending the scope of Yahweh’s institution of the eight “appointed times” with the nation of Israel through Moses.

Bear in mind that the Sabbath precedes the covenant Yahweh made with Israel at Mt. Sinai, and therefore precedes instructions in Leviticus 23. Its origin was established from the beginning of creation for all creation.

Yet it became at Mt. Sinai “the sign of the covenant” Yahweh made with Israel (*cf.* Exodus 31:13), a new development in understanding it for Israel’s role and mission in the world.

As the sign of the covenant, it may never be abrogated as long as the covenant He made with Israel remains in effect. As long as God's covenant stands, the Sabbath stands. As long as Israel exists, the sign of the covenant exists—the Sabbath.

In Isaiah 66:22-23, the prophet of Israel declared:

“For just as the renewed heavens and the renewed earth which I make will endure before Me,” declares Yahweh, “So your offspring and your name will endure. And it shall be from new moon to new moon and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all mankind will come to bow down before Me,” says Yahweh.

As Jesus (Yeshua) said in Matthew 5 of the Torah and Prophets, “as long as heaven and earth” exists.

To properly understand and appreciate the purpose of the eight “appointed times”, then, we should look back in time well past Moses (Moshe) to Abraham whom Yahweh assigned to serve as the father-designate of the hordes of all peoples of the earth. The name “Abraham” literally means “father of hordes”.

To separate Israel's role and destiny from its Abrahamic calling may lead to a misinterpretation of Yahweh's purpose and mission for the eight “appointed times” Yahweh chose to meet with the people of Israel. The ultimate benefit is for the salvation of the nations. Each “appointed time” prophetically reveals the identity and work of the Messiah in saving both Israel and the nations of the world.

The eight appointed times are missional for Israel in its witness to the nations of the earth. First, they remind Israel of its Messianic mission. Second, they testify to the nations of God's unique covenant with Israel to bring the light of salvation (*yeshua*) through Israel to the world. Third, they validate the presence of God in the world as working in covenant with Israel.

One of the surest signs of God's existence in eternity is the existence of his covenant people on earth through all their sufferings, exiles.

Fourth, they testify of the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua) to Israel, revealing patterns of understanding, knowledge and wisdom of God's way in revealing his eternal Son.

Thus Israel as a nation is the bearer of the truth that the Messiah comes from Israel as the eternal Light to the nations. Indeed, the appointed times, all eight of them, bear witness to the Messiah of Israel and Yahweh's “appointed times” to meet Israel.

Examining the Text of Abraham's Calling

Consider the calling of Abraham as described in Genesis 12:1-3 and its international significance. We examine it through the lens of its Hebraic structure and design:

Frame

A And Yahweh said to Abram,

Forward symmetry

A Go, go yourself from your land,
 B and from your kindred
 C and from the house of your father,
 D to the land which you will see.
 A¹ ² And I will make you into a great nation.
 B¹ And I will bless you,
 C¹ and I will make your name great.
 D¹ And you be a blessing!

Reverse concentric symmetry

A ³ And I will bless those blessing you.
 B And the one treating you with contempt will I curse.
 A¹ And all the families of the earth shall bless themselves **in you.**"

Forward asymmetry

A ⁴ So Abram went as Yahweh had spoken to him.
 B And Lot went with him.

In short, the identity, mission and destiny of Israel are embedded "in Abraham" and Yahweh's dealings with this towering patriarch of faith. Further, Yahweh's blessing of the nations is also determined for those nations who bless themselves "in Abraham". The Hebrew verb "bless" is reflexive, meaning "bless themselves", not "bless them."

To appreciate the tenor of the "appointed times", we do well to remember that the leverage of Israel's self-understanding is vouchsafed "in Abraham" and his issue through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob, also known as "Israel".

The eight "appointed times" may not be separated from Yahweh's original purpose in calling Abraham, for they are part of the redemptive design for the nations carried out in Israel's obedience.

The nations have a huge interest in the obedience of the people of Israel to Yahweh and his *toroth* ("instructions") for their own sake. They should cheer them on in their observances, or else provoke them to jealousy by their own faithful obedience to Yahweh so Israel becomes the obedient nation Yahweh desires.

In Yahweh's calling of Israel from among the nations to separate the nation from the rest, *i.e.*, to make it holy, separated people unto Him in covenant with him, He sought to rescue, recover and restore the nations from their idolatrous, rebellious state as shown in Genesis 11. Israel's identity, role and purpose ever should be understood and appreciated as missional in regard to the nations based upon Abraham's calling into a covenantal relationship with Yahweh.

The biblical basis of Israel's mission is amplified in Genesis 18:17-19. These few verses serve as the preamble statement for Israel's identity, role, mission and destiny. Indeed, we may call it the preamble for the Torah, which means "instruction, guidance":

¹⁷ And Yahweh said, "Shall I hide from Abraham that which I am doing?"

¹⁸ For Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation [*goy*],

and in him all the nations [*goyim*] of the earth [*ha-eret*] shall bless themselves [*baruk* (*niv'r'ku* – niphil; reflexive)].¹⁹ For I have known [*yada*] him, that he may instruct [*tzavah* – command] his children and his household after him to keep [*shamar* – preserve] the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness [*tzedaqah*] and justice [*mishpat*] so that Yahweh may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken of him.”

The concept of Yahweh “knowing” Abraham is expressed with the term “hand”. The idea is of having intimate knowledge of Abraham to the degree Yahweh forms and shapes him. This is reminiscent of Adam’s creation by being “formed” (*yatzar*) out of the dust of the ground, presumably by “the hand” of Yahweh.

In this passage, for the second time in the Bible we are introduced to the word *shamar* (“to keep, safeguard, preserve”). The first occasion of the term is found in Genesis 3:34 where it is used of the cherubim guarding the gate of the Garden of Eden. The text reads: “. . . at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard [*lishmor*, from *shamar*] the way [*et-derek*, from *derek*] to the tree of life.”

In both instances, the term *shamar* is used to safeguard “the way” (*derek*). As cherubim guard entry to the Garden of Eden, Abraham and his descendants, in similar intensity, are destined to guard “the way of Yahweh in righteousness and justice,” the human equivalency to cherubim guarding with “the flaming sword.”

In the succinctness of Genesis 18:16-19 we find what may be described as the preamble to the collective body of *toroth* (plural, “instructions, guidance”) found in the *Torah* (singular), the first five books of the Bible.

With regret, the next occasion *shamar* is found in the Bible is in Exodus 16:28 where it reads: “Then Yahweh said to Moses, ‘How long do you refuse to keep [*shamar*] my commandments [*mitzvot*] and my instructions [*toroth*]?’”

Bear in mind this charge of disobedience that follows Israel throughout its meandering history preceded the events of Moses (Moshe) ascending Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah to constitute the people of Israel as a nation.

Sadly, but understandably owed to the iniquitous nature of mankind since Adam, from earliest times the people of Israel often conceded its mission to follow the short-term, bent-out-of-shape urges and drives of human nature common to “the way of other nations” that led them into idolatry and rebellion. Yahweh’s giving of *toroth* (“instructions, guidance”) through commandments (*mitzvot*) placed borders around human nature to fence it in in order to keep Israel moving forward in its Abrahamic identity, mission and destiny. Yahweh’s giving of *toroth* was Israel’s antidote to the willy-nilly, precipitous rule of kings and the bent of human nature towards lawlessness and chaos.

To sum, everything of Israel’s calling, identity, mission and destiny is rooted “in Abraham” and Yahweh’s command to guard the way of Yahweh in righteousness and justice before the nations of the earth. So are the eight appointed times.

The prophets echoed the same theme of Israel’s missional purpose to the nations. For example, in this translation from the Hebrew text of Isaiah 42:6 we read:

⁶ 'I am Yahweh.

I called you in righteousness [*tzedeq*],

and I strengthen your hand,

and I guard you,

and I give you for a covenant [*berith*] people for [*the*] light of [*the*] nations [*goyim*] . . .

The prophets reinforced the calling of Abraham as Israel's daily mission assigned by Yahweh is "to keep the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness [*tzedaqah*] and justice [*mishpat*]."

The long-range objective of a righteous and just walk in the way of Yahweh is to "repair the world" (*tiqqun 'olam*), to restore it into right relationship with Yahweh from creation itself to all living beings inhabiting it. This wide range of stewardship covers every aspect and relationship of human life and endeavor for the sake of wholeness (*shalom*)—in faith, marriage, child-rearing, education, vocation, business, finance, medical, legal, science, technology, literature, arts and entertainment, security, and all other fields assigned to human life. In every aspect and relationship the success of Israel is not in its gains and prosperity, its advances and causes, but in its "keeping the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness and justice" as the desired model for the nations to emulate.

Of such is the kingdom of God (*Elohim*) lived out on earth through this unique royal priesthood assigned by Yahweh for the nations.

To neglect the missional, redemptive elements of all that Yahweh has in mind for the nation of Israel from the beginning, including the eight "appointed times" within the framework of his covenantal relationship, would be a major oversight. Moreover, such neglect may lead to gross error in how the "appointed times" given for Israel's unique relationship with Yahweh relates to his redemptive purpose (and judgment) of the nations.

We do well to keep the bigger picture of the nations in focus when studying the eight "appointed times" Yahweh appointed for Israel. Israel keeps the "appointed times" for the repair of the world (*tiqqun 'olam*), for the blessing of the nations and the offer of restoration unto God (*Elohim*).

In its unique placement among the nations, Israel is Yahweh's "firstborn son" from among the nations (*cf.* Exodus 4:22), the "firstfruits" of the end-time harvest of nations as reflected in the commemoration of the Day of Atonement (*Yom ha-Kippurim*), the sixth of the seven annual "appointed times". The people of Israel have a solemn obligation to keep all the "appointed times", not for themselves alone, but for the manifest destiny of the world revealed in the Torah, Prophets and Writings of ancient Israel and, supremely in the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua).

In fact, every "appointed time" is an "instructive event" for Israel to keep the way of Yahweh revealed in the Torah, Prophets and Writings, and perfectly in his eternal Son, the Messiah Jesus. No harm is done to call these events "the appointed times of the Messiah." Indeed, without Him as the historic and apocalyptic focus of all the "appointed times" as the firstborn son of Israel, Israel would miserably fail its mission and the world would never experience its repair and restoration (*tiqqun*) unto God (*Elohim*).

For gentiles, a deep appreciation should fill their hearts and minds for knowing that Israel keeps the eight "appointed times." The "appointed times" bear witness to Israel and the nations through faith in the Messiah Jesus. They bear witness *against* Israel and the nations for unbelief. Jewish people are a

direct beneficiary of such observances, whether they believe now or, ultimately, through the salvation of national Israel at the return of the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua) to Jerusalem. Whether all Israel believes or not, as is the latter case, we celebrate with Israel for the Jewish people to become what they are to be in mission to the nations.

Hebraic Literary Structure and Design

Let's take a look at the literary structure and design of the account of the "appointed times" in Leviticus 23 in an analytical and evaluative way. Rather than study each "appointed time" separately, let us look at the Hebraic literary whole to see what may be learned that may be overlooked otherwise.

Proper terminology is important. Also is a clear understanding of literary relationships within Leviticus 23. What does our text really say? What does it not say, but may imply? What does it not say that should not be implied? What relationships and events precede this list of the "appointed times" in the Torah that helps explain them in proper context? They simply were not a concoction of events independent of each other. Rather, a dialogical relationship exists between each one with the others. How do these appointed times speak to each other? How do they connect in divine wisdom?

We shall pursue these questions within a limited frame of time and reference.

Two Feasts, Four Mealtimes and a Fast

Technically, only two of the seven "appointed times" are actually called "feasts", or "festivals" (*chaggim*): the Feast of Unleavened Bread (*Chag haMatzah*) and the Feast of Booths (*Chag Sukkoth*). The rest are other special days of significance in Yahweh's plan for Israel.

All of the "appointed times" involve a meal except the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*, *Yom ha-Kippurim*), a fast day. The fast day, which occurs only once among the appointed times, is for good cause to explain the role and mission of Israel, as we shall explain.

The noun *chag*, meaning "festival," is derived from the verb *chagag* which means to "dance in a circle". It is reminiscent of the popular Jewish dance known as the *hora*. Two of the "appointed times" are distinguished by this characterization calling for a high level of spiritual and physically exuberant celebration.

Eating food is a part of all the other "appointed times" except for the Day of Atonement, the day of national fasting. Why is food so important to all of the appointed times, even its exclusion in the sixth appointed time—a day of fasting?

In Bible times, an aptly spread table of food and drink shared between two families was more than a social gathering where they fellowship while breaking bread together. In fact, at times the meal was a reconciliation meal for a family and friends to come to the table to forgive each other and to reconcile their broken relationships.

The Hebrew word for "table"—*shulchan* (*shin-lamed-chet-nun*)— sounds somewhat like one of the Hebrew words "to forgive"—*salach* (*samek-lamed-chet*) (cf. Talmud, Y. Yoma VIII; Numbers Rabbah s. 16 *et al.*). The orthography suggests a direct relationship between these two words, the table being a place where the forgiven meet together, or the place where forgiveness is requested.

Traditions of Middle Easterners for conflict resolution include unique hospitality rituals where a meal is served. A primary ritual is *sulch*, a term which means “settlement” as in settling a debt or issue. The prayer Yeshua taught his apprentices was to “forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). Another is *muslacha*, which means “reconciliation.” These are both commonly called *sulch*. These rituals, still common in Arabic cultures, are performed by the “guilty” party for the benefit of the offended person/group. If between individuals the ritual is usually private. Where families are involved, the ritual of reconciliation is done publicly. For the people of Israel, partaking of the food from a table (*shulchan*) at a *sulch* is a means to fix (tiqqun) a broken relationship. Further, we see why eating food, because of its redemptive function to mend broken relationships, should not be the food offered to idols.

The fact that six of the seven annual “appointed times” are convocations where food is served on a *shulchan* (“table spread,” “table”) gives light to the kernel concept of forgiveness, reconciliation and fellowship celebrated in these events. They point to the work of the Messiah to save us from our sins.

“The Appointed Times” of Leviticus 23

The primary introduction in the Bible to the seven “appointed times” (*mo’adei*) is Leviticus 23 where all are captured in one succinct summary, including the weekly “appointed time” known as the Sabbath.

Bear in mind that this eight-part summary of Leviticus 23 given to Moses by Yahweh, as stated before, is not the origin of the eight events. It is simply a listing of them together to show their prophetic interconnectedness through the literary structure and design of the passage. Each “appointed time” has its own history as part of the whole summary. Leviticus 23 provides an instructive summary of the eight “appointed times” already part of the history and experience of Israel.

To understand the annual “appointed times” when Yahweh chose to meet with Israel on his calendar as instituted in the exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12), studies also should be done per event, tracing their different origins in the Torah.

True enough, but studying each of the eight “appointed time” as separate stories of Israel with distinct purposes of their own may miss the unifying force of the narrative entirely. Each “appointed time” is connected to the others in an inseparable way of understanding.

Leviticus 23 is the collection of the “appointed times” woven intricately together by specific terms and expressions. Though separate events, they are understood to hang together. Indeed, they should not be isolated from each other if we have a proper overview. In fact, the eight appointed times are about the Messiah as emphasized previously. The weekly Sabbath reveals the Messiah as do the seven annual appointed times. Indeed, these may be referred to as the Messiah’s “appointed times” to meet with Israel.

The unifying force of all these eight appointed times is the first one—the weekly Sabbath. Every one of the seven annual appointed times is a kind of separate annual Sabbath event. Sabbath does not have to fall on the seventh day always. Though always the seventh day is the Sabbath, other Sabbaths during the week may be observed. The seven annual “appointed times” tell us when and how.

In this light, the seven annual appointed times should not be separated from the general meaning of the weekly Sabbath as the specified “holy time” (time “set apart”) for rest from labor. Like the Sabbath, the

seven annual appointed times are like expanded, extended, open windows to peer into eternity through the lens of time and space where we live day-by-day, moment-by-moment. The Sabbath is the day set aside from all others to peer into eternity beyond our concern for things—the stuff of daily work.

Peering into eternity for what? The answer begs an answer—that we may grasp the awe and wonder of the Eternal One beyond the limits of time and space. In fact, this is the essence of all of the eight appointed times for Israel. They offer us—those within Israel—opportunity to enter into “holy time”—“set apart” time—to peer through the window of time and space beyond time and space into eternity to listen and learn from God, to sense his endless wonder. Moreover, we take this day to peer into God’s face in eternity through faith, and comment to our family and friends on the glory of his wonder, the awesomeness of Him who created all things, He who was and is and shall be.

Look up into the night sky, the way the Sabbath begins at sunset. Think of a fireworks show out there beyond you in space, high in the sky, with its colorful blasts accompanied by deafening sounds from above with oohs and ahs of the watching crowd, each engaged somehow in the spectacular event with different levels of appreciation.

Now think of the eight appointed times as awe-inspiring events appointed by YHWH from eternity for Israel on earth to engage in his awe-inspiring events with a spectacular view from earth. The gaze of the participants is set beyond the reach of time and space to the unreachable Eternal One who inhabits eternity, who created all things of time and space, who gives us hope, who redeems and reconciles us through faith in Him from the powerful slave-master of sinful nature. Ah! The wonder of it all.

As all the nations travel together on Spaceship Earth through the continuum of time and space, the covenant people Israel are offered a window through the eight appointed times—the one and only Messianic window—to peer through into eternity to experience Yahweh’s awe, wonder and powerful love for everyone. Israel is called to understand itself as God’s people to demonstrate his image and likeness before the rest of the world so they too may be in awe and wonder of Yahweh and his majestic love. The mission of Israel is to show the nations the wonder of Almighty God revealed in his Messiah.

Sadly, Israel failed, though not all its citizens, because of its idolatry and disobedience. Gladly, the Messiah of Israel came at the right time—at the appointed time—and did not fail, but redeemed us and reconciled us unto God. The good news message of hope and meaning in life, of salvation and redemption, begins with Israel and goes to the ends of the earth through his messengers, Jew and gentile.

John’s Gospel and the Appointed Times

Amazingly, the literary design of the Gospel of John is structured around the eight appointed times of Israel. And yet another—the festival of Chanukah, is included as part of Israel’s redemptive story.

Though Israel as a nation failed, and continues to fail to the present day in its divine mandate to be the full light of salvation to the nations, Jesus (Yeshua) succeeded as the embodiment of the house of Israel, son of David, son of Abraham, for the house of Israel and for all the nations of the world.

Hence, we who are from among the Jewish people, and those who are not who believe, we go together into all the world and make disciples of all nations till all have heard and have had reasonable

opportunity to receive the Messiah's saving message through faith in Him. Such is the work of the people of the kingdom of God on earth—Jew and gentile.

Plodding deliberately ahead, let's take a closer look at the narrative of Leviticus 23 to see what more we may learn.

The *Halakha* of Leviticus 23

Let's examine the whole *halakha* teaching of Leviticus 23 whereby Yahweh instructed Moses to proclaim the eight "appointed times" to Israel.

This teaching was to prepare the second generation of Israel to cross over to Canaan, the Promised Land of their inheritance from Yahweh. Generations before, Yahweh gave this land to Abraham by cutting a covenant of blood with him, reaffirming the covenant to his descendants, to both his son Isaac (Yitzchak) and his grandson Jacob (Ya'acov). The land, known as the Holy Land ("land set apart"), was given for Israel's habitation. Also, it would become the physical site for the dwelling of God's *shekinah* (invisible Presence) among his covenant people who dwelt amidst the nations of the world.

This *halakha* given by Yahweh to Moses regarding the "appointed times" was to instruct the people of Israel prior to entering the Holy Land on how to live before God. Israel was commanded to observe the weekly Sabbath, the first listed among the "appointed times", and the seven annual "appointed times", the very times when He promised to meet with Israel. What we should appreciate about these appointed times is that at these "right times" in each calendar year Yahweh would meet with Israel within the observances. To neglect them, at minimum, was to neglect Yahweh's promised presence.

A Few Words about Translating Hebrew into English

In the rendition of the biblical text of Leviticus 23 as shown below, the reader may feel the awkwardness of moving away from the smoothed-out flow of an English translation to an almost literal translation of ancient Hebrew.

Hopefully, by rendering the text into English in a wooden-like, literalistic translation, we may see and identify the Hebrew structure and style of the writing. Success in this effort will aid the student to feel something of the ancient literary fabric of Leviticus 23 in its recital form. With this approach, the student should be able to recognize (1) the literary movements within the text, (2) the repetition of certain Hebrew phrases drawing attention, (3) the uniqueness of certain statements, and (4) the pronounced literary symmetry of the original Hebrew. All these and more are invaluable to understand and interpret Hebrew Scripture properly.

As a help to reading the translation, something the translation itself cannot do adequately, remember that Hebrew is a language filled with concrete words to describe what is common to us as abstract ideas. It is very unlike the Greek language so fond for abstract concepts such as characterized in Greek philosophy. English is as much a noun-driven language as it is by verbs and tends towards the abstract, unlike Hebrew. Unlike Greek and English, Hebrew is not a philosophical language at all. It is action-centered around verbs using concrete expressions to express deep ideas of God's revelation in history. Understanding this fundamental difference helps us understand the biblical text better.

We do well to point out that ancient Hebrew had no verb for “is” and “are” as is basic to English. “Is” and “are” are not action verbs. Instead, they describe a state of existence. Hebrew assumes existence, emphasizing action instead. Where appropriate, verbs pertaining to a state of existence such as “is” and “are” are added in the rendition of the text and typically will be shown in brackets or italicized.

Observations are very important to understand the plain (*pashat*) meaning of a text, the highest level of biblical interpretation. Observe, for example, in the rendering of Leviticus 23 below that more words are used to describe the “appointed times” of Day of Pentecost (*Yom Shavuoth*) in 23:15-22 and the Festival of Booths (*Chag Sukkoth*) in 23:34-43 than for the other five “appointed times”. This shows their significance amidst the other “appointed times”.

Both Shavuoth (Pentecost) and Booths conclude the two grand segments of the complete list of annual “appointed times.” The Day of Shavuoth (Pentecost) concludes the connections of Passover, Unleavened Bread and Firstfruits. The Festival of Booths (*Chag Sukkoth*) concludes the connections of the Day of the Trumpet Blast and the Day of Atonement, both connected by the ten Days of Awe (*Yamim Nora'im*). More is written by Moses under God’s inspiration, then, about these two festivals than the other five.

Observing literary nuances helps the Bible student to gain familiarity with the narrative. Notice in the text below the frequent connection between the number seven (*shevah, sheva*), the ordinal seventh (*shavi'i, shevi'i*), Sabbath (*shabbath*), rest (*shav*), full rest (*shabbathon*) and resting place (*moshavathekem*). These words, characterized by the number seven, or, more literally, the root concept of the term “to rest,” populate Leviticus 23. They share the same linguistic root and have phonetic similarities. A keen eye sees that even the English word *seven* is rooted phonetically in the Hebrew word *shevah*.

In our effort to ascertain the plain (*pashat*) meaning found in Leviticus 23, the best approach is to determine the Hebraic literary structure and style within its historical setting and context.

Hebraic Literary Structure and Style

The convention of using the alphabet to show the literary lines of conceptual meaning within the Hebrew text is preferred over the common method of versification by numbers as found in the Bible.

Nevertheless, verse numbers are preserved for reference purposes, with emphasis, however, on the line-by-line concepts of Leviticus 23 established by alphabetical letters.

This method of identifying concepts line-by-line assists in isolating literary repetition, movements and other literary forms. While no claim is made to the perfection of this effort, the effort alone is rewarding and not disappointing. Ease of discovering the plain (*pashat*) meaning is augmented, and, as much, the historical and prophetic implications are more easily drawn out from the plain meaning as they refer to Israel’s history, life and destiny.

By outlining the literary structure to separate its features, and by additional highlighting certain features of the outline where repetitive phrases or statements occur, we are allowed to see connections otherwise may not have been noted in a casual reading. This aids in the discovery of biblical concepts that stand good throughout the Bible itself.

The Text of Leviticus 23

Leviticus 23 reads as follows according to its outlined literary structure and style.

Top Frame (headline statement for sabbath times)

Forward alternating symmetry

A Yahweh was speaking [*yedabbar*, from *dabbar*] to Moshe [Moses]

B to say [*leamor*, from *amar*],

Forward alternating symmetry

A² “Speak [*dabbar*]

B to the sons of Israel,

A¹ and say [*amarta*, from *amar*]

B¹ to them:

Reverse concentric symmetry (repeated in verse 4)

A ‘The appointed times [*mo’adei*] of Yahweh

B which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations [*miqrei*]—

A¹ these, the same, are my appointed times [*mo’adai*]:

Appointed Time of the Sabbath

Forward alternating, antithetical symmetry

a³ ‘For six days work may be done,

b but the seventh [*shavi’i*] day is a Sabbath [*shabbath*] of full rest [*shabbathon* – “resting”], a holy convocation [*miqra*].

a¹ You shall not do any work [*i.e.*, on the Sabbath].

b¹ It is a Sabbath to Yahweh in all your resting places [*moshavathekem*, from *moshav* derived from *shav* – “to rest, to sit down”].

Reverse concentric symmetry (in forward symmetry when combined with verse 2b)

A² ‘These are the appointed times [*mo’adei*] of Yahweh,

B¹ ‘holy convocations [*miqra’ei*],

A³ which you proclaim in the appointed times [*mo’adam*].”

Appointed Time of the Passover

Forward symmetry (with following section on unleavened bread)

a⁵ ‘In the first month,

b on the fourteenth day of the month in between the evenings,

c Passover [*Pesach*] unto Yahweh.

Appointed Time of Unleavened Bread

Forward symmetry (continued from section on Passover)

a¹ . . . [assumed “In the first of the month”]

b¹ ⁶ And on the fifteenth day of the same month

c¹ the feast of unleavened bread [*chag ha-matzoth*] unto Yahweh.

d¹ Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread.

a² . . . [assumed “In the first of the month”]

b² ⁷ On the first day you shall have a holy convocation [*miqra-qodesh*].

c² All your fullness of work you do not do [*i.e.*, you stop to feast].

- d² ⁸ And you shall bring [*an offering of*] fire to Yahweh seven days.
a³ ... [assumed "In the first of the month"]
b³ On the seventh day is a holy convocation [*miqra-qodesh*].
c³ All your fullness of work you do not do. "'

First Internal Frame (headline statement for first of four major sections)

- A⁹ Then Yahweh spoke to Moshe [Moses],
B to say,

Forward alternating symmetry

- A ¹⁰ "Speak
B to the sons of Israel,
A¹ and say
B¹ to them:

Appointed Time of Firstfruits (Barley)

Forward asymmetry

- a 'When you enter the land which I give to you,
b and reap its harvest,
c you shall bring in the sheaf of the first of your harvest to the priest [*ha-cohen*].
d ¹¹ He shall wave the sheaf before the face of Yahweh for your favor.
e On the morrow after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.
- a ¹² 'And on the day when you wave the sheaf,
b you shall offer a male lamb without defect of the first year
c for a burnt offering unto Yahweh.
a¹ ... [implied, "And on the day when you wave the sheaf"]
b¹ ¹³ And a grain offering shall be two-tenths parts [*of an ephah*] of fine flour mingled with
oil,
c¹ an offering by fire unto Yahweh *for* a soothing aroma.
a² ... [implied, "And on the day when you wave the sheaf"]
b² And the drink offering thereof shall be of wine [*yayin*], a fourth of the hin.
c² ¹⁴ And bread and roasted grain and full ears you do not eat until this same day
until you bring in of the offering of your God—
d² **[This is] a statute forever throughout your generations in all your resting places**
[*moshavathekem*, from *moshav* derived from *shav* – "to rest"].

Appointed Time of Yom Shavuoth (Day of Pentecost)

Forward asymmetry

- a ¹⁵ 'And you shall count for yourselves from the morrow after the sabbath,
b from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering.
c Seven complete Sabbaths shall be done,
d ¹⁶ even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath shall you count fifty days.
e And you shall offer a new [*charashah*] grain offering [*minchah*] unto Yahweh.

Forward asymmetry

- a ¹⁷ 'You shall bring in from your resting places two wave loaves of two-tenth parts [*of an ephah*].

- b They shall be of a fine flour.
- c They shall be baked with leaven [*chametz*] as first unto Yahweh.

Forward symmetry

- a ¹⁸ 'And you shall offer with the bread seven male lambs without defect of the first year,
- b a young bullock,
- c and two rams.
- a¹ They shall be a burnt offering unto Yahweh,
- b¹ with their grain offering
- c¹ and their drink offering,
- a² even an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to Yahweh.

Forward symmetry

- a ¹⁹ 'You shall also offer one male goat for a sin offering
- b and two male lambs of the first year for a sacrifice of peace offerings.
- a¹ ²⁰ And the priest [*ha-cohen*] shall wave them with the bread of the first fruits for a wave offering before Yahweh,
- b¹ with two lambs [*i.e., as a peace offering*].
- a³ They shall be holy to Yahweh for the priest [*ha-cohen*].

Forward asymmetry

- a ²¹ 'And you shall make a proclamation on the same day.
- b There shall be to you a holy convocation [*miqra*].
- c All your fullness of work you do not do—
- d [*This is*] a statute forever throughout your generations in all your resting places [*moshavathekem*, from *moshav* derived from *shav* – “to rest”].

Forward asymmetry

- a ²² 'When you reap the harvest of your land,
- b you shall not fully reap to the corner of your field,
- c nor gather the gleanings of your harvest.
- d You shall leave them for the poor,
- e and for the stranger.”

Self-Disclosure Summary Statement (first of two)

Forward asymmetry

- A I am Yahweh
- B your God [*Eloheikim*].”

Second Internal Frame (headline frame for second of four major sections)

- A ²³ Again Yahweh spoke to Moshe [Moses]
- B to say,
- A ²⁴ “Speak to the sons of Israel
- B to say:

Appointed Time for the Day of the Blast of Trumpets

Forward asymmetry

- a 'In the seventh month,
- b on the first of the month,
- c [it shall be] a full rest to you,
- d commemorated by a blast [of trumpets],
- e a holy convocation.
- f ²⁵ All your fullness of work you do not do.
- g And you shall offer an offering by fire unto Yahweh.'"

Third Internal Frame (headline frame for third of four major sections)

- A ²⁶ Yahweh spoke to Moshe [Moses],
- B to say,

Appointed Time for the Day of Atonements

Forward asymmetry

- a ²⁷ "Surely on the tenth day of this seventh month
- b [is] the day of atonements [yom ha-kippurim].

Forward symmetry

- a There shall be a holy convocation for you.
- b And you shall humble your souls.
- c And you shall offer an offering by fire unto Yahweh.
- a¹ ²⁸ Your work you shall not do on this same day,
- b¹ for it is a day of atonements [yom ha-kippurim]
- c¹ to make atonement [le-kapper] for you before Yahweh your God [Eloheikim].

Forward asymmetry

- a ²⁹ If there is any person who will not humble himself on this same day,
- b he shall be cut off from his people.

Reverse concentric symmetry

- a ³⁰ And whatsoever person does any work on this same day,
- b that person I will destroy from among his people.
- a ³¹ You shall do no work at all.

Forward asymmetry

- a It is to be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your resting places.
- b ³² It is to be a Sabbath of full rest to you,
- c and you shall humble your souls.
- a¹ On the ninth of the month at evening,
- b¹ from evening until evening,
- c¹ you shall keep your Sabbath."

Fourth Internal Frame (headline frame for fourth of four major sections)

- A ³³ Again Yahweh spoke to Moshe [Moses]
- B to say,

- A ³⁴ "Speak to the sons of Israel
- B to say:

Appointed Time for the Festival of Booths

Forward symmetry

- a 'On the fifteenth of this seventh month
b [is] the feast of booths [*chag sukkoth*]
c for seven days unto Yahweh.
a ³⁵ 'On the first day is a holy convocation.
b All your fullness of work you do not do.
c ³⁶ For seven days you shall offer an offering by fire to Yahweh.

Forward asymmetry

- a¹ 'On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation
b¹ All your fullness of work you do not do.

Forward asymmetry

- a ³⁷ 'These are the appointed times of Yahweh
b which you shall proclaim as holy convocations,
c to offer offerings by fire unto Yahweh—
d . . .
a₁ a burnt offering,
b₂ and a grain offering,
c₃ sacrifice,
d₄ and drink offerings,
[each] on its own day—
e ³⁸ apart from the Sabbaths of Yahweh,
f and apart from your gifts,
g and apart from all your vows,
h and apart from all your freewill offerings which you give to Yahweh.

Forward asymmetry

- a ³⁹ 'Surely on the fifteenth day of the seventh month,
b when you have gathered in the fruits of the land,
c you shall keep the feast of Yahweh seven days.

Forward symmetry

- a 'On the first day
b shall be a rest.
a¹ And on the eighth day
b¹ shall be a rest.

Forward asymmetry

- a ⁴⁰ 'And you shall take to yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees,
b . . .
a₁ palm branches,
b₂ and boughs of leafy trees,
c³ and willows of the brook,
and you shall rejoice before Yahweh your God for seven days.
c ⁴¹ And you shall keep it a feast to Yahweh for seven days in the year.

- d 'It is a statute forever throughout your generations.
e You shall keep it in the seventh month.

Forward asymmetry

- a ⁴² 'You shall dwell in booths seven days.
b All the native-born in Israel shall dwell in booths,
c ⁴³ so that your generations may know
d that I made the sons of Israel to dwell in booths
e when I brought them out from the land of Egypt.

Self-Disclosure Summary Statement (second of two)

Forward asymmetry

- A I am Yahweh
B your God [*Eloheikim*].''

End Frame

- A⁴ ⁴⁴ And Moshe [Moses] declared to the sons of Israel the appointed times of Yahweh.

Five Major Frames

Upon review of this rendition of the Hebraic structure and style of Leviticus 23, specifically by indicating the five frames of the narrative led by the sentence, "And Yahweh spoke to Moses to say . . .," the five major movements of the narrative are partitioned off from each other. The partitioned sections are:

- Section 1 – the Sabbath (*Shabbath*)
- Section 2 – the Passover (*Pesach*)
 - Feast of Unleavened Bread (*Chag Matzah*)
 - Day of Firstfruits (*Yom Bikkurim*)
 - Day of Pentecost (*Yom Shavuoth*)
- Section 3 – Day of the Blast of Trumpets (*Yom Teruah*)
- Section 4 – Day of Atonements (*Yom ha-Kippurim*)
- Section 5 – Festival of Booths (*Chag Sukkoth*)

Why did Yahweh, in his words to Moses, make these five partitions between the "appointed times" at these particular places?

The separation between section 1 and the rest of the "appointed times" is obvious. The Sabbath is observed weekly. The other seven are observed as annual events. This accounts for the first separation.

Section 2 has three "appointed times" that happen, either concurrently during the same week, or, as for the Day of Pentecost (*Yom Shavuoth*), is inseparably connected to the third "appointed time", Firstfruits (*Bikkurim*), by the command to count fifty consecutive days. This suggests that these three that occur sequentially during one week combine to tell a narrative as a unit connected by time with the second phase of the narrative, the Day of Pentecost (*Yom Shavuoth*).

The means for numbering the days was assisted by a method called "counting the *omer*". The count of fifty days begins immediately on Firstfruits (*Bikkurim*) of the barley harvest and ends on the Day of Pentecost (*Yom Shavuoth*), the day of the firstfruits of the wheat harvest. This explanation demonstrates

the logic of considering these four “appointed times” as one inter-connected group that should not be separated.

Sections 3, 4 and 5 are separated by Yahweh as events that stand-alone in their importance.

Four Binding Declarations by Yahweh

Another key literary marker in the narrative of Leviticus 23 is Yahweh’s statement, “It is a statute forever throughout all your generations.” This binding declaration occurs for four of the seven annual “appointed times”: Firstfruits (*Bikkurim*), *Yom Shavuoth* (Day of Pentecost), Day of Atonements (*Yom ha-Kippurim*) and the Festival of Booths (*Sukkoth*).

A legal, binding statute was not mandated by Yahweh for the Passover (*Pesach*), Feast of Unleavened Bread (*Chag haMatzah*) and the Day of the Blast of Trumpets (*Yom Teruah*).

What is the significance of this? Why did *Bikkurim* (Firstfruits), *Yom Shavuoth* (Day of Pentecost), *Yom ha-Kippurim* (the Day of Atonements) and *Chag Sukkoth* (Festival of Booths) merit being separated from the other four by a binding statute?

The answer is simple, except for *Yom ha-Kippurim* which deserves additional attention.

Bikkurim (Firstfruits), *Shavuoth* (Pentecost) and *Sukkoth* (Booths) were the three agricultural events celebrated annually when the harvest seasons began, hence, the time of firstfruits. These were called the *Shalosh Regalim*, the three biblical pilgrimage festivals because it involved the taking of firstfruits offerings to present unto Yahweh at the Jerusalem Temple.

- *Bikkurim* was the offering of the firstfruits of the barley harvest to Yahweh
- *Yom Shavuoth* (Day of Pentecost) was the offering of the firstfruits of the wheat harvest to Yahweh
- *Chag Sukkoth* (Festival of Booths) was the offering of the firstfruits of vines and the trees

The other four festivals do not have this agricultural, firstfruits distinction. Therefore, they do not have statutes to bring temple offerings of firstfruits of each harvest to Yahweh accompanied by the command to rest from their labors to enjoy the harvest seasons.

Why then is *Yom ha-Kippurim* (Day of Atonements) distinguished by a binding statute like the three harvest times?

For one, this “appointed time” is exactly five days before the bringing in the firstfruits of the fall harvest. The people’s thoughts are on the harvest and Yahweh’s beneficence. But it is much more than a day of considering the firstfruits celebrations. This pales in comparison to the objective of the day—to be a day of soul-searching, of humbling oneself and fasting. It is the only annual fast day given by Yahweh in the Bible.

What makes this day important is at least two-fold. First, the day commemorates the humbling of national Israel as the firstborn among the nations as if it were the first of the harvest of the nations. In this way, it corresponds to the other three firstfruits offerings: barley at Firstfruits (*Bikkurim*), wheat at Pentecost (*Shavuoth*), and fruits of vines and trees at the Festival of Booths (*Sukkoth*). Second, the basic

concept of the name for this day, Day of Atonements (*Yom ha-Kippurim*), is that Yahweh provides a *covering* for Israel, the essence of the word *kippur* (“cover”).

Usually, the word *kippur* is translated as “atonement”, but this may not be an adequate translation to express what really is intended. For sure, Yahweh intends to cover Israel for safeguarding, as a preserving act in order to establish the people in his holy ways as first among the nations. Thus, it is regarded as the holiest of all “appointed times” to meet with Yahweh, the day set apart more than any other “appointed time”—the day regarded as “the holy of holies.”

Importantly, this day that is the holy of holies of all days, reminds Israel of the Abrahamic covenant that was foundational to the nation’s chosen status as the *firstborn* among the nations. Israel’s mission was to instruct in “the way of Yahweh in righteousness and justice” before the nations as the firstborn people of God so that the nations may bless themselves in Him. Such is the emphasis given by Yahweh to the purpose and mission of Abraham and his descendants as found in Genesis 18:17-18:

¹⁷ And Yahweh said, “Shall I hide from Abraham that which I am doing?

¹⁸ For Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation [*goy*], and in him all the nations [*goyim*] of the earth [*ha-eretz*] shall bless themselves [*niv’r’ku* is the *niphil*, or reflexive of *baruk*]. ¹⁹ For I have known [*yada*] him, that he may instruct [*tzavah* – command] his children and his household after him to keep [*shamar* – preserve] the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness [*tzedaqah*] and justice [*mishpat*] so that Yahweh may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken of him.”

Now we see the reason for the statute to memorialize the day for all generations. Like the first sheaves of barley and wheat grain are brought as grain offerings at the “appointed times” of Firstfruits (*Bikkurim*) and Pentecost (*Shavuoth*), and as the firstfruits of the trees and vineyards are brought to Him at the Festival of *Sukkoth*, in like manner the sons of Israel, as the *firstborn* among the nations (cf. Exodus 4:22), humble themselves on the Day of Atonements (*Yom ha-Kippurim*) even as the grains and fruits are humbled by being harvested at their “appointed times”. The Day of Atonements is for the people of Israel a Day of Coverings when Yahweh harvests the firstborn from among the nations in response to their bowing before Him in humility of heart before the harvest of the nations of the earth.

Two Grand Movements of the Whole

Another key marker in Leviticus 23 is the twice-made declaration by Yahweh: “I am Yahweh your God [*Eloheikim*].” One instance is with *Yom Shavuoth* (Day of Pentecost) and the other with the Festival of Booths (*Chag Sukkoth*). For no other “appointed times” beside these two, *Shavuoth* and *Sukkoth*, does Yahweh make this self-disclosure statement in the narrative of Leviticus 23.

What should we make of this?

Perhaps, if we see the two declarations (“I am Yahweh your God [*Eloheikim*]”) as concluding summaries of the sum of the preceding festivals, we understand that the first declaration ends the first four “appointed times” and the second declaration ends the last three (or previous six) of the “appointed times”.

If this observation has merit, then we see the festivals in two grand movements of Yahweh’s “appointed times” as if each of the two movements bear prophetic overtones in the life of Israel as Yahweh’s people

and its mission to the nations. Both *Yom Shavuoth* (Day of Pentecost) and *Chag Sukkoth* (Festival of Booths) relate to the offering of firstfruits to Yahweh and the care of Israel for the nations. Indeed, this seems to be the case.

“Appointed Times” as Prophetic Patterns of Redemption and Mission

Three overall concepts are embedded in the eight “appointed times,” including the Sabbath. The first is Yahweh’s work to reclaim sinful humanity, beginning with Israel, through acts of redemption and salvation. The second is to advocate Israel’s firstborn role among the nations as being missional to the nations in accordance with the Abrahamic Covenant whereby the nations are blessed because of Israel. The third is the role of the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua) to fulfill the hopes expressed in each “appointed time” in sequence beginning with Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits and Pentecost. This was done in the life, ministry, passion, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus (Yeshua) and is the record of the Jewish Nazarene Writings of the first century.

Thus, the first four “appointed times” are fulfilled prophecy. The remaining three “appointed times”—the Day of the Awakening Shout (sometimes referred to as the Festival of Trumpets), the Day of Atonement and the Festival of Booths remain unfulfilled in the Messiah. These shall be fulfilled in sequence at his second coming to earth from heaven.

Convocations as Rehearsals

In Leviticus 23:2 we find the word “convocation”:

- A ‘The appointed times [*mo’adei*] of Yahweh
- B which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations [*miqrei*]—
- A¹ these, the same, are my appointed times [*mo’adai*]:

The word convocation (*miqra*) or, the plural, “convocations” (*miqrei*), is found eleven times in Leviticus 23. Its use as found in Leviticus 23:2 refers to the weekly Sabbath as a series of “holy convocations [*miqrei*].” In 23:4, the same stanza is repeated, but this time introducing the seven annual “appointed times” as “holy convocations [*miqrei*].” Thus, the two times we encounter the plural use of “convocations” it refers to either the weekly Sabbaths during the course of the year, or the annual “appointed times,” often called the feasts or festivals, except for the Day of Atonement which is a fast day. Of the eleven references to convocations, two of them are summary statements.

What about the other nine? In each case, they are in the singular as “convocation [*miqra*].”

23:3	Sabbath (<i>Shabbath</i>) (once)
...	Passover (<i>Pesach</i>) (none)
23:7-8	Festival of Unleavened Bread (<i>Chag haMatzah</i>) (twice)
...	Firstfruits (<i>Bikkurim</i>)
23:21	Day of Pentecost (<i>Yom Shavuoth</i>) (once)
23:24	Day of the Blast of Trumpets (<i>Yom Teruah</i>) (once)
23:27	Day of Atonement (<i>Yom Kippur</i>) (once)
23:35-37	Festival of Booths (<i>Chag Sukkoth</i>) (thrice)

Worth noting is the fact that Passover (*Pesach*) and Firstfruits (*Bikkurim*) do not have a reference to the “appointed time” of each as a holy convocation (*miqra*), but in the overall summary description, all “appointed times” are holy convocations (*miqrei*).

Curiosity, of course, asks the question why these two festivals were not specifically called holy convocations in their respective portion of the narrative. Then the question arises, why did the Festival of Unleavened Bread (*Chag haMatzah*) have two specific references and the Festival of Booths (*Chag Sukkoth*) has three such references? This is the fodder for finding simple, or plain (*pashat*) emphases within a given Bible passage.

Regardless of the purpose for the distribution (on non-distribution) of the designation of “holy convocation,” the word “convocation” (*miqra*) refers to all the eight “appointed times.” The Hebrew word *miqra* also bears the related meaning of “rehearsal”. These holy convocations, therefore, are a time Israel is set apart by Yahweh (the very meaning of “holy” (*qodosh*) is “set-apart”) to rehearse the past and anticipate the future under Yahweh’s movement of Israel and all history through linear time where time is unique, unpredictable and unrepeatable.

Historical and prophetic implications are enjoined simultaneously in a holy convocation to rehearse Israel’s past and to project its destiny from within the circumstances of the present day.

The Phase of the Moon

The “appointed time” of the weekly Sabbath is unrelated to the phases of the moon, and is set apart, therefore, not only by its weekly observance, but by disassociation with the moon for reckoning its observance.

The ancient Hebrew calendar was based on the new moon as the beginning of a new month. Our word “month” is derived from the word “moon.” Of special note is that for each *annual* “appointed time” a phase of the moon is determined for each “appointed time,” whether it is waxing or waning, a new moon or a full moon.

Of the last two phases, the new moon and the full moon, only two of the appointed times fit either of these specific times. The first “appointed time,” Passover, is on the full moon—the middle of the month, the time of the Exodus from Egypt. The fifth “appointed time,” the Day of the Awakening Shout (*Yom Teruah*, identical with *Rosh Hashana*), is on the new moon, the beginning of the month when the first gleam of light shows. Passover (*Pesach*) occurs in full moonlight, the apex of moonlight to lighten the darkness. The Day of the Awakening Shout (*Yom Teruah*) is in pitch darkness with a shimmer of light beginning to wax.

Moon Phase	Appointed Time
Full moon	Passover (<i>Pesach</i>)
Waning	Festival of Unleavened Bread (<i>Chag haMatzah</i>)
Waning	Firstfruits (<i>Bikkurim</i>)
Waxing	Day of Pentecost (<i>Yom Shavuoth</i>)
New Moon	Day of the Blast of Trumpets (<i>Yom Teruah</i>)
Waxing	Day of Atonement (<i>Yom Kippur</i>)
Waning	Festival of Booths (<i>Chag Sukkoth</i>)

The connection of the “appointed times” to the phases of the moon is dependent on the new moon, even with Passover on Nisan 14, midway between new moons. The citing of the new moon was an important part of the monthly ritual in ancient Israel. It established the dates of the “appointed times” Yahweh chose to meet with Israel.

Why is the moon so important to Israel? An obvious answer is that it is a celestial way to keep time. Even as the day is marked by the rotation of the earth (from sunset to sunset), and the year is marked by the earth’s orbit around the sun, the month is reckoned by the phases of the moon. All these time measurements—day, month and year—are dependent upon cycles within the created universe and, more specifically our solar/lunar system. Sidereal time (star time) was also a measurement used by the ancients and is prominent in the Zodiac.

Time, like space, is a result of God’s creation. The time-space continuum is better understood today than ever, thanks in large part to a twentieth century Jewish interpreter of creation whose name is Albert Einstein. He explained his theory of relativity as based on how he perceived God may have thought about time and creation from its inception. What influenced his reasoning from his childhood was the profound description of time-space as described in the first creation account of Genesis 1:1-2:3 where the time-space continuum was God’s good creation of the heavens and the earth. Jewish thought about the meaning of life remains impacted today by the two creation accounts of Genesis (1:1-2:3; 2:4-25).

But why is the moon so important to Israel besides being a measurement of the lunar month? The answer lies in it being a sign to Israel as are the moon and the stars. Understood as signs, and not merely as time measurements, we began to see the importance of their mark on the covenant people of God.

The question becomes, then, what do the stars, sun and moon signify to Israel besides what it means to the rest of the nations?

To the nations of old, these three-types of celestial objects were more than time markers. They were also worshipped as gods. They were a primeval basis for idolatry. Yahweh would have his people to have no part in this evil behavior. For Israel, the stars, sun and moon, according to God’s Word, were to be understood as signs of the seasons. The terse account of the creation of the fourth day reads:

¹⁴ Then God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, **and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years.**

¹⁵ And let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth”.

And it was so.

¹⁶ God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night. [*He made*] the stars also.

¹⁷ God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ and to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ There was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

(Genesis 1:14-19)

Sabbath Time is Unique from All Other Time Measurements

The exception to marking time celestially, of course, is the Sabbath. It is not reckoned by celestial time markers at all. The seventh day, concluding a week of a year, is unique from all other markers of time. Its basis of time measurement is not based on the continuum of space and time—that is the celestial

creation, but from an eternal decree of how long the week is to be. It is a marker that separates its origin from time to its origin in eternity.

Time on a Rail

The surrounding nations of Israel saw time as a cyclical, repetitive routine where fatalism ruled the day. Festivals were weekly, monthly and annual, but without historical reflection as to what may be the hope of tomorrow beyond what has been experienced and known thus far. Progress was a mere spiral upward while destruction was a spiral downward, ever-circling like a moth around a glowing light. Life went nowhere. Inventions stood still because invention requires hope and a promise. Where cultures interpret reality as cyclical, human progress falters. An existential reality where everyone does what is right in his own eyes guides the masses.

Where time is conceived as cyclical, the predominant worldview surrounding ancient Israel, the view of God is darkened by fatalism. Hope requires a breakthrough time into something new, a breakout of cyclical time. Cyclical belief systems yield to the worship of man-made gods, cosmic force such as found in Stoicism, or secularism where any notion of god is merely man's self-mastery of the world.

Israel stood alone in its understanding of time as a movement from the past, through the present, into the future without repeating itself in a cycle. To the Hebrew, reality was the movement of time in a linear way where every moment of time was unique, unpredictable and unrepeatable. Astrology, a mythological art of cyclical patterns, therefore, was verboten. Fortune-telling, likewise, was a sin against the people of Yahweh, and most of all, against Him. The myths and gods of Israel neighbors was a sad demonstration of their cyclical worldview where time was not unique, but predictable and repeatable.

In Yahweh's revelation to Abraham to call him from his homeland in the Ur of the Chaldees to cross the River Jordan into Canaan to a new homeland, time as Abraham knew it was shattered (see Genesis 12-22). The cyclical worldview could not account for Yahweh's revelation outside of the familiar. Abraham was commanded to forsake the familiar routine of his life cycle for a hope and promise he had never experienced before. The whole life episode of Abraham is about his set-apartness from his culture and neighbors to live out time on a rail taking him from the past into the future where lies hope and promise.

The eight "appointed times" (*mo'edim*) is in stark contrast to the festivities of the neighboring nations of Israel. The nations of Egypt and Canaan were trapped in a time capsule of inane repetitions. Israel, because of Yahweh's self-disclosure to the patriarchs and to Moses, dared to hold holy convocations that not only echoed their history, not only spoke to their present generation, but also gave the nation hope and a promise far beyond anything they knew or could imagine.

Ultimately, Yahweh was leading Israel into the unknown in his unique revelation from beyond creation and history into the present day world with a bright hope of tomorrow. Such are the "appointed times" when properly understood as to their value and direction for Israel in revealing our blessed hope in the Messiah Jesus (Yeshua).

Yahweh's Mission to Israel and the Nations

Ultimately, as the eight "appointed times" testify and verify, Yahweh's mission was to dwell (*shaken*) among his covenant people, the nation of Israel that Israel be a blessing to the nations. From Israel's

national inception in the exodus out of Egyptian slavery to its national formation in the Sinai desert and settlement in Canaan, Yahweh purposed to dwell amidst Israel so that the covenant nation, regarded by Yahweh as “the firstborn” (*ha-bechor*) among the nations.

And I shall dwell [*shakanti*, from *shaken*] in the midst of the sons of Israel,
and I shall be to them their God [*Elohim*].
And they will know that I am Yahweh their God [*Eloheikim*]
who brought them out of the land of Egypt to dwell [*shakni*] in the midst of them.
I am Yahweh their God.

(Exodus 29:45-46)

Of interest is the Hebrew verb *shakan* (“to dwell”). Since ancient Hebrew has no vowels, the transliterated word would be spelled as *sh-k-n*, the “sh” sound being one letter, not two. To turn it into a masculine noun, one way is to add the letter *mem* as a prefix, thus, *m-sh-k-n*, pronounced *mishkan*. This means “dwelling place” and is the same word for “Tent of Meeting” or “Tabernacle.” To render the verb as a feminine noun, the letter *he* is added as a suffix to the verb, hence, *sh-k-n-h*, pronounced *shekinah*. It means “dwelling presence” and refers to the dwelling presence of Yahweh among his people Israel. We can readily see the mission of Yahweh to dwell among his people as affecting different aspects of his revelation to Israel.

Suffice it to say that three primary passages of Scriptures from the Torah summarize Yahweh’s purpose and mission to Israel and the nations:

- Exodus 34:6-7 – His Name and relational attributes
- Genesis 18:18-19 – His way of righteousness and justice
- Exodus 29:45-46 – His desire to dwell among Israel

Many of the concepts of the Bible’s narratives are traceable directly or indirectly to one or more of these three primary passages. In the same way, the eight “appointed times” (*mo’edim*) are best understood as convocations rooted in these three scriptures for their expressions.

The annual “appointed times” reminds Israel of Yahweh’s desire, not only for his people Israel to be set apart from the nations as a separate people as his dwelling place, but much more. He desires for Israel to be unique as the firstborn nation among the nations to bring international hope to the nations that they may be reconciled with Yahweh through Israel’s obedience in the way of Yahweh as a priesthood of the nations. This is core to everything about Yahweh’s calling, purpose and mission for Israel.

The Literary Tapestry of Leviticus 23

The weekly Sabbath is the first of the eight “appointed times” (*mo’edim*) Yahweh chose to meet with Israel to bring about his purpose and mission. Of the eight listed in Leviticus 23, the Sabbath is considered first. Upon close observance of the literary structure, the discussion of the Sabbath is separated textually from the seven annual “appointed times” (*mo’edim*). Moreover, it is encapsulated by textual symmetry in its introduction and conclusion statements, setting it apart from the other “appointed times” to be considered independently (as shown in the translated text above). Hence, while the Sabbath stands apart from the rest in its importance and treatment, the annual “appointed times” stand together in a unified literary pattern that suggests their interrelated connectedness and importance to each other.

The Hebraic literary structure of Leviticus 23, therefore, summarizes all eight “appointed times” of Yahweh in one concise narrative, separating the Sabbath from the others. But the literary structure does so much more than list the weekly and annual events.

The phrases and sentences of the Hebrew text uniquely weave together and connect the seven annual events as a literary tapestry to be considered as a whole, like a grand-scale plan of Yahweh to meet with Israel at specific, interrelated times of the calendar. Each successive annual event is tied to the others, moving forward from Passover to the last and great event, the Festival of Booths (*Sukkoth*). This interwoven feature of the literary structure signifies that all seven should be considered as a whole, the sum of its seven parts.

While the tendency may be to study each annual “appointed time” as separate entities, which they are by virtue of the calendar, the danger is that they may be considered unrelated or disconnected to the rest. The better approach to study the seven annual “appointed times” is to consider each event as part of an annualized sequence of *dependent* events where each one draws upon the other for its meaning and significance.

Of the seven annual “appointed times” (*mo’edim*), the first four are connected textually as springtime events even as the last three are connected as events of the fall season. Of the first four “appointed times”, the connections are obvious with the overlapping of Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and Firstfruits (of barley) in one week. The counting of fifty days from Firstfruits to the Day of Pentecost (*Yom Shavuoth*), traditionally referred to as the counting of the omer, shows the connection of Pentecost to the preceding three “appointed times.” The last three “appointed times” occur in the same month, the month of Tishrei, and are anticipated by the Day of Pentecost (and, by connection, the preceding three festivals). To consider one “appointed time” apart from its connectedness to the other six annual events will not reveal the majesty of these “appointed times” according to Yahweh’s purpose and mission. They should be held together upon the examination of individual ones.

The Fourth Position of Seven as a Hinge Event

The Day of Pentecost (*Yom Shavuoth*) is the festival that reflects not only its roots in the agricultural harvest of wheat, to which it was pegged, but in a grander way to the harvest of the nations for Yahweh’s redemptive purpose.

The pivotal hinge event of the seven annual “appointed times” is the Day of Pentecost (*Yom Shavuoth*). It knots together the first three with the last three annual events. As the middle event, it is in the fourth position of the seven annual events. In this position, the Day of Pentecost expresses the desire and intentions of Yahweh to abide with Israel by his Spirit, the *Shekinah* (the divine Dwelling Presence). This is framed within the international mission of Yahweh as understood in the Abrahamic Covenant that the nations bless themselves in relation to Israel, the firstborn among the nations.

The Bible is full of references to the number seven and multiples of seven. The significance of the number is usually attributed to the idea of fullness of the natural order.³ For example, a week was set as a natural order of seven days, six days for work and the seventh day for rest. The menorah that stood in the Tent of Meeting and, later, the Temple, was made of seven lamps held together as one. The

³ Bullinger.

agricultural cycle (*Shemithah*) was for seven years, the first six in which the land was worked and the seventh year in which it lay fallow as a Sabbath year. By association, all debts were canceled and indentured servants released in the seventh year. The Festival of Unleavened Bread is seven days as is the Festival of Booths. The Day of Pentecost, also known as the Feast of Weeks, is factored by seven full weeks (seven times seven), commemorated on the day following the fullness of the seven weeks. The Year of Jubilee, similarly, was factored by seven full years (seven times seven), or forty-nine years, commemorated in the fiftieth year upon the fullness of the forty-nine years.

Of the seven days that make a week, it was the *seventh* day that was separated out, *i.e.*, made holy as a day of rest. Of the seven lamps of the menorah, the *first* lamp that stood apart in the middle above the others was the servant (*shammash*) lamp to serve as the source of light for the rest. In these two examples, the first and the last positions serve as the greatest positions, depending upon the emphasis. For resting, the seventh day is greatest. For light, the first lamp is greatest, but it is light that serves the days of the week. At creation, the first day is significant to light the world, and the seventh day is significant as set apart from the rest for resting from work. The first and the last are best, the first for service and the last for resting.

Of the seven annual “appointed times” it is the seventh festival, the Festival of Booths (*Chag Sukkoth*), which is called the greatest of all. It is the great week of culmination of all the year’s harvests and is set aside for rest. But it is the first “appointed time”, namely Passover (*Pesach*), that lights the world with its full moon. What, then, do we make of the festival in the fourth position, by no means the greatest, but significant, nevertheless, as the hinge event for the first three and last three “appointed times.” Its placement serves to bring about the crucial transition of time from the end of the spring festivals to the fall “appointed times” commemorated at the harvest of the fields, trees and vines in the fall with the seventh festival. The Day of Pentecost is the in-between festival to transition from the former to the future days of Yahweh’s favor.

The first three festivals anticipate the Day of Pentecost with its message of international import, and the last three gain their significance in their transition from the Day of Pentecost to the last and greatest Festival of Booths (*Sukkoth*), also known as the Festival of the Nations.

Whatever we may conclude, the Day of Pentecost is the hinge and linchpin between the first three and last three “appointed times” to bring about the occasion and opportunity for the reconciliation of the nations with Yahweh. In like fashion, the Festival of Booths, in its missional purpose as the Festival of the Nations, the international harvest Yahweh planned and sought since the beginning of nations (*cf.* Genesis 10-11).