

LEVITICUS

Lesson 35 - Chapter 23 Conclusion

Leviticus chapter 23 is where the 7 Biblical Feasts are ordained and explained. We've covered the first 4 of them thus far: the 3 Spring Feasts of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits, and then the 1 Summer Feast called Shavuot in Hebrew, known better in Christendom as Pentecost.

Now we arrive at the 3 Fall Feasts. We've look at the first those, Yom Teruah, which is better known in our day as Rosh Hashanah, Jewish New Year. This day falls on the 1st day of the 7th month of the Hebrew Religious Event Calendar. Ten days later is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, and the one we began to discuss before our lesson ended last week was Sukkot, also known as the Feast of Tabernacles, also known as the Feast of Booths.

Let's re-read a small portion of Leviticus 23 to establish the context for today's lesson.

RE-READ LEVITICUS 23: 33 - end

The first thing established is the date of the Sukkot Festival: it is to begin on the 15th day of the 7th month (known today as Tishri). Further it is to be a 7 day long event, and then after the 7 days, on the 8th day, is to be a holy convocation; a meeting together to worship.

In vs. 37 were also introduced to another part of the Sukkot celebration ritual called in Hebrew necek. And it means libation.....or as its often called.....a drink offering (I don't like that term because it really conjures up the wrong mental image of what is going on here). This libation offering usually consists of water or wine or both. The one mentioned here is a water libation. And without going into all the detail of the actual ritual let me just say that water is put into a special vessel and then it is poured out by a priest at the Temple during a special ceremony.

What is the meaning of this water libation? Simple, really. Recalling that all these feasts are agricultural-based and that the Feast of Tabernacles, Sukkot, occurs at the FINAL harvest of the season before new crops are planted, the water libation is connected with the plea to Yehoveh for rain.

The rainy season in Israel is generally late October to March. Rain was key, as the Israelites did not practice irrigation. If the rains didn't come then the spring harvest would be very poor. This water libation occurred everyday during the Feast of Tabernacles. As very little is said in the Torah of just HOW the water libation ritual was to be accomplished traditions were developed on its proceedings; and, of course, these traditions changed over time.

Because of something I want to show to you shortly, about a story concerning Jesus, I want to briefly explain the water libation tradition as it was observed in His day.

The High Priest would take a special vessel down to the Pool of Siloam and fill it with about a quart of water. In the meantime, some other priests went to another pool of water where willows grew; they gathered the willows and laid these long willow branches against the sides of the Great Altar of Burnt Offering, such that they extended above the platform and formed kind of a canopy. Two different pools of water were used for a very practical reason: the Pool of Siloam was nearby and it was where the city obtained much of its fresh water. The Pool of Siloam was quite large, at least half an acre in size, and it was a plastered pool fed by a manmade aqueduct. People washed their clothing there and filled their water jugs for drinking and cooking. Because this pool had been plastered it was very much like a large modern swimming pool, so no vegetation grew in it. Therefore in order to obtain the necessary willow branches a group of priests had to go to a source of water that was natural, where vegetation did grow. It's possible that source was a substantial stream that at one time flowed through the Kidron and Hinnom valleys that bordered the city walls, but they may well have had to go all the way to the Jordan River, several days of travel away, to have willow branches brought to the Temple for this ceremony.

The High Priest would dip his golden pitcher into the Pool of Siloam and then proceed to a well-known gate in the high walls which surrounded the Holy City: the Watergate (it got its name because of this exact ceremony). He would wait there until some Levites sounded 3 loud trumpet blasts, and then he would go to the Great Altar, and in front of large crowds pour the water out while saying in a loud voice: "Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" (this was taken from Isa. 12:3). As the High Priest poured out the water libation another priest poured wine out of a pitcher; when that was done music was played by the Levites and then the crowd would recite Psalm 118:25: "Save now, I pray, O Lord; O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity". This song was called the Hosanna (Hoshanna). During this song scores of priests would march around waving palm branches. I hope some of this is conjuring up a memory of a happening in the N.T. with all of these same elements.

I have mentioned repeatedly that practically every scene in the Bible of Yeshua being in Jerusalem had to do with His being there as a pilgrimage for one or the other of the 3 pilgrimage feasts. After all, Jesus lived well to the north in the Galilee far from Jerusalem, so there had to be a good reason for him to ever venture there. Not only that, but Jesus didn't have much regard for the Priesthood and the tradition-based Judaism that now ruled every aspect of a Jew's life; so unlike that vast majority of Jews in that era He wasn't just itching to be there. Let's take a look at one of those times he was in Jerusalem because it is centered on the feast we're currently looking at: the Feast of Tabernacles.

Turn in your Bibles to the Book of John, chapter 7. As I am a bit of stickler in making sure that we have the entire context correct when we study God's Word, we're going to take the time to read this entire chapter.

READ JOHN 7 all

Verse 2 says that it was the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, so it was early Fall, about 30 A.D. Yeshua was in His hometown region of Galilee and was reluctant to go to Jerusalem because Jerusalem was in the province of Judea. And it says that the Jews were seeking to kill Him. Actually where it says, "Jews were seeking to kill Him" is misleading; what it actually says is that the "Judeans were seeking to kill Him". In other words, it was only certain Jews (those who lived in the province of Judea thus the title of Judeans) who were against Him, not so much Jews who lived in other areas. In Yeshua's day it was more usual for Jews from the Galilee to be called Galileans, Jews from Samaria to be called Samaritans (or Samaritans in English), and Jews from Judea were called (appropriately) Judeans. Jesus was a Galilean. Galileans generally didn't like Judeans; Judeans didn't like Galileans; neither Judeans nor Galileans had much use for the Samaritans.

At this time in history Judaism was very fractured, generally along territorial boundaries (but also according to political beliefs and family blood lines). The Galileans were a long way from the Jewish capital of Jerusalem so they were less affected by the religious politics and the intellectual elite who represented the ruling authority of the Jewish religion whose power base was in Jerusalem. It was much like it is in the USA today where we talk about Red States and Blue states: Blue states meaning politically liberal, Red states meaning politically conservative. And in general we find that the closer a state is to Washington D.C., the more liberal it is and the more interested it is in the finer points of politics; the further away from the center of government, like in the Mid-West, the people are less concerned with politics and are less impressed with the so-called intellectual elite. Rather they just want to live simple lives and practice their beliefs in more basic ways. It was like that in the Holy Land in Yeshua's time. Galileans were similar to people living in Kansas, while Judeans were more like New Yorkers.

But despite the great differences and disagreements, while the Galileans *still* recognized Jerusalem as their religious capital, the Samaritans had taken the drastic step of setting up their own separate brand of Judaism. The Samaritans had, for all practical purposes, seceded from the religious system that was centered in Jerusalem. They had established a separate priesthood with their own high priest; they had even built their own Temple on Mt. Gerizim in Samaria, at which they sacrificed using their own Temple Altar. I tell you all this so you can understand that to lump all Jews together in Christ's day, and to say that "the Jews" did this and "the Jews" did that, and "the Jews" believed this and that is so overly simplistic as to be wrong and inaccurate; it is very akin to the way people in foreign countries look at New York City as the stereotypical American city, representing the average American cultural lifestyle and attitudes. When in fact we who live elsewhere know that New York City is more the exception than the rule in America.

John 7:14 tells us that somewhere in the middle days of the Feast of Tabernacles Yeshua was teaching in the Temple; so as one would expect He observed the Law of Leviticus 23 and made pilgrimage to the Temple for Sukkot. Some of the Judeans who heard him speaking asked, in vs. 15, how it is that such an uneducated person could know such things as He was teaching and that he could teach it with such assurance and authority (meaning his words cut to the core of every issue). Why did they assume He was uneducated even though he seemed to know more about the Torah than anyone they had ever heard? Because He was a Galilean. And the **ONLY** place in the Holy Land that one could gain a good education.... which, by the

way, was ONLY religious education,.....was at the knee of the one of the many Rabbinical schools all located in Jerusalem. And no good Galilean would ever go to those schools in Jerusalem; such was the distrust and dislike between Judean Jews and Galilean Jews.

The Judean Jews in Jerusalem became the minority for a few days because this was the time of the Pilgrimage Feast of Tabernacles. Jews from all over Asia and the Roman Empire were there, as were Jews from the Holy Lands of Galilee (and even a few from Samaria who didn't agree with the Samaritan religious authority's break with the Jerusalem Temple authority). Most people who lived in the Holy Lands were fully aware of this Yeshua fellow, and that He was one of those disgusting Galileans. We can know this because it says so in vs. 28 when Yeshua says to the crowd: " You both KNOW me, and know where I'm FROM..."

By now Yeshua was well known; He had his admirers and his detractors. Some Jews had already come to believe He was Messiah, others thought the whole idea ridiculous primarily because in their minds there was no way the Messiah could possibly come from the Galilee; still others thought Him a danger and preferred he go away by whatever means. As it says in vs. 43: " So there arose a division in the multitude because of Him". And, of course, that division we see in the Gospels is still present today as a result of His coming.

Now I could spend a lot longer with this chapter but I just want to show you a couple more things. And keep in mind that all this is happening within the context of Jesus participating in the Feast of Tabernacles.

In verse 37 it says the following: "Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying: If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink."

The last day of the Feast of Tabernacles is like the grand finale. Tradition even gave that last day a special name: Hoshanna Rabbah. On that last day all the rituals are exaggerated and expanded. The particular one I want to focus on is the water libation ceremony because on all other days of the feast, the High Priest came through the Watergate with his golden vessel full of water (taken from the Pool of Siloam), his signal to enter being the sound of 3 trumpet blasts. But on the **last** day the Levites blew 7 trumpet blasts and then repeated it 3 times. The crowds waited in great anticipation of this moment in which the feast was drawn to a close. The High Priest then solemnly carried that golden pitcher of water up the several steps to the Altar and waited until the crowd quieted and gave him all their attention. Then, with great drama, he lifted the water libation vessel and poured out its contents for the last time.....not to be done again until next year.

It was at this very moment, as the water is draining from the golden pitcher, that Jesus turns to the multitude and yells out: " If any man is thirsty, let him come to ME and drink." You see, most sayings of Jesus can and MUST be identified with some context that is going on around Him for us to grasp its true meaning.

You can imagine the sudden and awkward silence of the crowds; the stunned and angry priests; the offended Pharisees. Yeshua had used the biggest event of the biggest Feast, and the climactic water libation ritual, to proclaim Himself God, the source of living water! He

sealed His fate right then and there, on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Well, let's get back to Leviticus 23.

One of the interesting commands God gives to the people is that they are to live in Sukkot, booths, during the full time of the feast. These open-air shelters could be constructed any number of ways, and so they too became subject to Rabbinical Tradition. The reason for making His people live in a Sukkah was to remind them of the 40 years that they lived in temporary shelter in the Wilderness.

Today in Israel you can see any number of ways people build Sukkot, from simple to elaborate. They even hang brightly colored glass balls and other flashy items from the roof of the Sukkah.....much like is done with a Christmas Tree.

Generally people no longer live those 7 days in Sukkot. For those who even bother to observe the Holy days they will eat, and sometimes the children will sleep, inside those shelters but that's about the extent of it.

I want to point out something important to you: the Torah has very little to say about just how one is to observe these feasts. In fact the Torah has very little to say about just exactly how to go about most of the God-ordained observances.....particularly after all the sacrificial rituals are removed. It is rules made by men that make most of these observances appear fairly uniform and that often causes arguments. That goes for Shabbat as well. That so Yehoveh in Torah commands little of us, says that we have great latitude about HOW to observe these special days. But, that is entirely different from **whether or not** we can choose to observe or not observe them. Further WHEN to observe these days is also quite clear (notwithstanding some disagreement over the calendar itself).

While I don't like the notion of giving up one set of wrong-minded gentile Christian traditions for a new set of wrong-minded Jewish traditions, there is certainly NOTHING wrong with establishing traditions. And the Jewish people have given us some awfully good and well established starting points for our observances; so many of the Jewish traditions should not be automatically thrown out anymore than all Christian traditions should be automatically thrown out. But traditions (Jewish or Christian) aren't God's commands. So as you as a family, or we as a group, work out our new understanding of Torah and how it ties in with our faith in Messiah Yeshua understand that we have much latitude in establishing the HOW...but NOT the whether or the WHEN..... of things like the Biblical Feasts. So let's not be judgmental or critical towards one another about it at all; rather let's use that latitude to be creative but reverent and true to the God-ordained meaning of each holy occasion. Let's use these Biblical Feasts, ordained by God, to replace the tired and worn man-made days that WE have declared holy (but God has not), and that invariably are just adaptations of pagan holidays.

Now that you better understand the PHYSICAL side to the Feast of Tabernacles, what is the SPIRITUAL aspect of it especially from a prophetic sense? Sukkot portends the setting up of the Millennial Kingdom, when Christ brings the full Harvest of Believers before His Father. It is the final ingathering of the people of the Kingdom of God; it is the last opportunity for anyone

alive at that time to acknowledge Yeshua's Lordship. This event is ahead of us. But, not too far, I think.

We're told that we don't know the day.....in fact Yeshua doesn't even know the day.....that the final ingathering will occur. Yet He says that we CAN know the season for many things that are still future to us. And I'm beginning to think that by using the word "season" He was alluding to the fact that a) the Biblical Feasts, being agricultural based, occur in real and specified seasons (spring, summer and fall), and b) therefore, as we now understand the inherent prophetic nature of the Bible Feasts we can know which Feasts represents His return. Since the Spring Feasts have been fulfilled with His execution and resurrection, and the summer feast of Shavuot (Pentecost) was fulfilled with the coming of the Holy Spirit, it leaves nothing but the 3 fall season Feasts to play out. So it's hard to see the season of His return as being anything other than literally the fall season of the year.

The Prophets tell us that the signal for the final ingathering of God's people for His Kingdom is when the Jews come back home. And that perfectly fits the pattern of the Feast of Tabernacles. For days and days **before** the start of the Feast....in preparation of the Feast..... people began their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Only once they were there did the Feast begin.

It's like that now; the Jews are coming back to Israel, more every day. The pilgrimage is under way. The only thing we don't know for sure is when that final Feast of ingathering will start. But I'd bet my boots that it WILL occur on the Feast of Tabernacles.....I just don't know what year. After all every other major act of Christ and His ministry exactly coincided with a Biblical Feast. From His death on Passover Day, to His entering the tomb on the 1st day of the Feast of Matza, to His rising on the Feast of Firstfruits; then the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Shavuot, Pentecost. The next major event ahead of us is the Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah, Yom Teruah).....a call to a holy convocation.....in this case a call to war when Christ returns to take the title deed to planet earth away from the Evil One. Quickly on the heels of that event is The Feast of Tabernacles, the entering into the Millennium.

Interestingly, we are also told that the Feast of Tabernacles will continue on into the Millennium.....the only feast of the 7 that will continue to my knowledge. We read about this in Zechariah, a prophesy about the last days and the transition into the 1000 year reign of Yeshua.

NAS Zechariah 14:16 Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. 17 And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them.

Maybe since we're going to be doing this in the Millennial Kingdom, we ought to get a jump-start on learning how.....now.

Before we move on to Leviticus 24 I'd like to show you something that I think is both exciting and quite sobering. I told you earlier that the procedure for the grand finale of the Feast of

Tabernacles was that BEFORE the High Priest entered the Temple grounds that the Levites would blow 7 trumpets 3 times. One of the reasons that I am convinced that Yeshua will return during the Fall Feasts is those 21 trumpet blasts.

In the book of Revelation, beginning in chapter 8, the Lord God begins to pour His wrath out over the entire planet. There is a series of 7 judgments, then a pause; then 7 more judgments, then a pause; and then a final 7 judgments lead up to the return of Messiah and the Battle of Armageddon. Notice that we have 3 series of 7 judgments, exactly like the 3 series of 7 trumpet blasts that ushers the High Priest into the Temple grounds. Also notice that in the book of Revelation it is AFTER these 21 judgments that Yeshua, who is our High Priest, makes His entry onto the scene and leads to Him taking His place in the Temple as our King.

Let me point out something else as well because it directly ties to the Fall Feasts. To announce the return of Messiah we are told that He will arrive with a shout. That is spoken of in ***NAS 1 Thessalonians 4:15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.***

This event is called the Rapture by Evangelical Christians and there have been all kinds of speculations on just when this will happen. These speculations go by a number of names such as pre-trib, mid-trib and post-trib and others. I'll speak briefly on that in a moment but first I want to continue with the key word "shout". Notice that 1 Thess. 4:16 associates this "shout" that announces the descent of Messiah with the trumpet of God. And it also makes the voice of the archangel associated with the trumpet of God. So the shout has something to do with the noise of a trumpet. The Hebrew word for shout is ***rua***.

The 1st Feast of the 3 Fall Festivals is called in the Bible Yom Te-rua. Calling that day Rosh Hashanah (as is done now) is kind of a nickname that is not used in the Bible and it also gives the day an additional meaning. Yom Te-rua means "the Day of the Trumpet Blasts" or "the Day of the Trumpet shouts" or as it is better known the "Feast of Trumpets" for short. In fact of the 3 or 4 specifically named kinds of trumpet or shofar blasts in the Bible, one of them is called "the Te-rua", and it means "the shout".

The Feast of Trumpets occurs but 2 weeks before the Feast of Sukkot. Since we are told in 1Thess. 4:16 that Messiah will return "with a shout", and that shout is directly connected to the trumpet of God, there is absolutely no doubt in my mind that this shout is a trumpet blast not a "shout" like a bunch of people shouting words or expressions.

Further since the "shout", the Te-rua, announces the return of Christ, and since the Feast of Trumpets occurs just days before the Feast of Tabernacles, I feel certain that 1 Thess. is referring to the day of the Feast of Trumpets.

So the Bible shows us that the procedure for the return of Messiah and the entry into the

Millennial Kingdom follows precisely the pattern for the Fall Feasts. First there is a “shout” (a trumpet), then there are 3 sets of 7 judgments, and then Christ returns. Now this doesn’t agree with the doctrinally based timetable of some Evangelicals who see a pre or mid Tribulation Rapture. But, frankly, I don’t think that kind of timetable holds water at all. It violates every God ordained pattern established in the Bible, and certainly nowhere does the Bible say anything about Christians avoiding the Tribulation (this is just a hope). What it says is that God will cut short the divine judgments He will pour out or no living thing would continue to exist on this rock we call earth.

Further we must understand that there is a vast difference between tribulation and God’s wrath. The tribulation spoken of in the Bible has nothing to do with God’s wrath being poured out; rather tribulation is about mankind’s evil run amok. Tribulation is about men doing terrible things to other men out of wickedness. Tribulation is NOT an act of God per se; it is an act of men.

God’s wrath on the other hand is divine acts of judgment brought about by God’s spiritual agents, His angels. It is God inspired punishments upon the earth and its inhabitants. Thus we have God’s angels going about crushing the planet with those 3 sets of 7 supernatural judgments (that are often called the Seal, Trumpet, and Bowl judgments) when God gives the order to do so.

The Biblical pattern since the book of Genesis is that God’s people do NOT escape manmade tribulations; BUT, we DO escape His divine wrath. God’s people (defined as those who are in fellowship with Him) do not escape evil earthly rulers, or being martyred for our faith. But NEVER does God pour out His wrath on the innocent along with the guilty. God does not destroy His people right along with His enemies.

Therefore while I don’t claim to know the exact timing of all these end times events, it seems incredulous to me that Christians are going to escape troubles caused by evil men. It has always been that people in proper fellowship with the Lord get harmed and killed. Most of the NT writers died awful deaths. Missionaries are regularly killed. All over this world, today, Christians are being tortured and murdered for their faith. It’s just that the tribulations will keep getting worse until God feels it is time to act. What Believers will escape is the destructive outpouring of God’s 21 judgments upon the earth; we will not be treated to His wrath.

So it seems to me that somewhere in the coming years when evil gets completely out of control, but just before God’s fury is spilled out on the earth and its inhabitants, the Rapture will happen and in one form or another Believers will be whisked away.

I also think (and I want to make clear that this is my opinion) that those 21 judgments will come very rapidly, beginning on Yom Teruah (the 1st day of the 7th month by the Hebrew calendar), and ending by the Feast of Tabernacles a mere 15 days later.

Why could it not be that God’s wrath begins on Yom Teruah of one year and that those 21 judgments are poured out over a longer period of a year or more, and then in another year’s Feast of Tabernacles Jesus comes? Because it would break the Biblical pattern. Yeshua was

killed on Passover, went the next day into the Tomb on the Feast of Matza, and then was raised from the dead on the Feast of Fruits. Fifty days later on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came. This all happened in succession in the same year; there is no reason to think the prophetic fulfillment of the Fall Feasts will be stretched out over multiple years; I am convinced they will be fulfilled in the same way the Spring and Summer Feasts were fulfilled.

I am equally convinced that the reason for many of the end times doctrines that we see today that require a healthy helping of allegory and stretching to make them work are because gentile Christians have thrown the baby out with the bathwater. When we determined that the Law and the Prophets were abolished, and that the OT is no longer relevant, we also abolished all of God's patterns. These patterns ARE the context for understanding the New Testament. So when they are ignored, we go off on tangents even if there is a nugget of truth buried in it somewhere.

We'll start Leviticus 24 next time.