

Emor

אמר

“Speak”

Leviticus 21:1 – 24:23

Torah Together



This *Torah* portion includes further instructions for the priests, emphasizing the need to maintain ritual purity or cleanliness. Also included are God’s “appointed times,” or feasts, known as *mo’edim* in Hebrew. God’s feasts, which he has ordained “for all generations,” have great prophetic significance regarding the Messiah.

1. Rules for Priests - 21:1-22:16

a) For the death of which relatives might a priest make himself ceremonially unclean? What actions might he take that would make him ceremonially unclean?

b) What restrictions were placed on the way a priest took care of his body? What reasons do you think God might have had for these restrictions?

c) What restrictions were placed on who a priest might marry? What reason is given for this? What restriction was placed on a priest’s daughter?

d) The restrictions placed on the high priest were even more exacting. At whose death was he permitted to mourn? What restrictions were placed on who he might marry?

Remaining Clean

As priests, Aaron and his sons were required to maintain a state of ritual purity so that they were always able to perform their jobs. **Leviticus 21:6** states, “Because they (the priests) present the offerings made to YHWH by fire, . . . they are to be holy.” Among other things, many of the common expressions of grief in Hebrew society would render a person ritually unclean. Thus for priests, public expressions of grief at the passing of a family member were restricted. The restrictions were even more severe for the High Priest.

Scripture Link:

Leviticus 10 tells of the deaths of Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu. Specifically, in **verse 6** God commands Aaron and his two remaining sons NOT to mourn the deaths of Nadab and Abihu lest they become unclean. Do you think this command might have had anything to do with the actions of Aaron and his sons described in **verses 16-20**?

Why punish someone for a physical defect?

To serve as a priest was a privilege granted by God to only a few: those Levite men of a specific age who were sons of Aaron, were without defect and were ceremonially clean. Because the priests represented a perfect God to the people, they had to be physically perfect. However, any son of Aaron who had a defect was still able to receive other priestly benefits (**Leviticus 21:22**).

Why were there so many detailed rules?

There are probably at least two reasons for this. The first is to reflect the holy, perfect, and awesome nature of God. A second reason might be that such rules helped set the worship of YHWH apart from the worship of the pagan gods in other cultures. The high standards of integrity required by the priests of YHWH stood in contrast to pagan priests who often used their positions to attain wealth and influence.

e) For what reasons might a potential priest be disqualified from serving?

f) God is insistent that his priests be ceremonially clean at all times. What were some things that would make a priest ceremonially unclean? What did they do to be cleansed? Why do you think this was important to God?

g) Only members of a priest's immediate family were allowed to eat the sacred offerings. Who was considered his immediate family? What was the punishment for violators?

2. Unacceptable Sacrifices - 22:17-33

a) For an animal sacrifice to be acceptable to God as a burnt offering or a fellowship offering, what must be its condition? What was the one exception to this rule?

b) How old must a young animal be before it is an acceptable sacrifice to God? What restrictions were placed on the sacrifice of an animal and its mother? What reasons do you think God may have had for this command?

3. The Sabbath and Appointed Feasts - 23:1-44

a) Which of God's "appointed times" is mentioned first? Do you think this is significant? What activities were common to all of God's "appointed times"?

Speak to the Israelites and say to them: “These are my appointed times, the appointed times of the LORD, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies.”

Leviticus 23:2

b) Which is the first “appointed time” or holiday in the year and when does it occur? What does it commemorate? What feast immediately follows this one? How long does this feast last? How is it to be celebrated?

c) Can you identify the name of the third “appointed time” and when it was to be celebrated? Specifically how was it to be celebrated?

d) When did the fourth “appointed time” occur and what was it called? How was it to be celebrated? Why do you think verse 22 is inserted here?

e) When and how is the fifth “appointed time” of God to be celebrated?

f) How is the sixth “appointed time” different than the others? When does it occur?

g) What is the seventh “appointed time” called? When is it to be celebrated and for how long? How is it to be celebrated? What things does it celebrate?

The Feast of Weeks

The fourth annual “appointed time” designated by God occurs in late spring or early summer. The Hebrew name for this feast is *Shavuot*, which means “sevens.” The Greek name for the feast is *pentecost*, which means “fifty.” In English, it is often called the “Feast of Weeks.” Can you see how all of these names are appropriate given when the feast is to be celebrated? This feast always falls on the same day of the week. Which day is that?

Scripture Link:

The entire chapter of **Leviticus 16** is devoted to a description of the requirements for observing *Yom Kippur*, or the Day of Atonement. There are specific tasks that are to be undertaken by both the priests as well as all the Israelites. In contrast, there is very little in scripture about celebrating *Yom Teru'ah*, the Feast of Trumpets (**Leviticus 23:24-25**). Does this difference give you any insight into God’s thoughts about these two “appointed times?”

The High Priest's Job Description

Assuring that the lamps in the Tabernacle were properly trimmed and filled each evening and morning and assuring that the Bread of Presence was set out each Shabbat seem like rather menial tasks for the High Priest. However, all things related to the presence of God in the Tabernacle were of vital importance to maintaining His required holiness. Thus it makes sense that the person ultimately responsible for representing the people to God and God to the people be intimately involved in these details.

Blasphemy is Serious

A good definition of blasphemy is "to speak with contempt about God or to be defiantly irreverent." A good example of blasphemy is found in the story of the Assyrian King, Sennacherib, and his commander when they threatened to attack Jerusalem. (The story is told in **Isaiah 36 and 37**. The events occurred after Assyria had completely conquered and dispersed the Northern Kingdom of Israel.) In his prayer asking that God deliver the Israelites from the Assyrians, Judah's King Hezekiah points out the Assyrian king's blasphemy. What God does to the Assyrians gives us a good understanding of how He views blasphemy.

4. Oil and Bread Set Before God - 24:1-9

a) What fuel was used for the lamps in the Tabernacle? Whose job was it to take care of the lamps and what was he to do?

b) How many loaves of bread were to be placed on the Table of Showbread and how were they arranged? What else was placed on the table? What symbolism do you see here?

c) When was the bread placed on the table? Whose job was this and who ate the bread?

5. A Blasphemer Stoned - 24:10-23

a) Describe the circumstances surrounding this incident. Who was it that blasphemed the name of God? How was his punishment determined? What exactly was his punishment? Who carried it out? What do you think of this entire episode?

b) Verses 17 - 22 may seem to be out of place here. What do you think is the main point of these specific verses? Why do you think they are placed here?

God's Appointed Times

Often translated as “feast,” the Hebrew word *mo’ed* is best translated “appointed time.” (The plural is *mo’edim*.) The word also carries the idea of “rehearsal,” or “practice.” Each of God’s *mo’edim* serves two purposes: one purpose is to remember a past event in the lives of God’s people where we were blessed (memorial) and a second purpose is to rehearse or practice for an event yet to come (prophetic). The chart below lists the seven annual *mo’edim*, each with its’ memorial and prophetic meanings.

| | When | Memorial Meanings | Prophetic Meanings |
|---|--|--|---|
| Spring Feasts | | | |
| Passover (<i>Pesach</i>) | 14-15 Nisan (<i>Abib</i>) | - Passover lamb sacrificed - Salvation from angel of death | - <i>Yeshua</i> crucified - Salvation from sin |
| Unleavened Bread (<i>Hag Hamatzot</i>) | 15-21 Nisan (<i>Abib</i>) | - Delivery from Egypt / slavery - Holiness, separation from sin | - <i>Yeshua</i> 's sinlessness - <i>Yeshua</i> , Bread of Life |
| Firstfruits (<i>Bikkurim</i>) | Day following Sabbath during Passover week | - Firstfruits of barley harvest - Begin counting the omer | - <i>Yeshua</i> 's resurrection, the firstfruits of the redeemed |
| Summer | | | |
| Weeks (<i>Shavu'ot</i>) | Fifty days after Firstfruits | - Firstfruits of wheat harvest - Torah given at Mt. Sinai | - Believers first filled with Holy Spirit |
| Autumn Feasts | | | |
| Trumpets (<i>Yom Teru'ah</i>) | 1 Tishri | - General harvest - Military victories | - <i>Yeshua</i> 's return |
| Day of Atonement (<i>Yom Kippur</i>) | 10 Tishri | - Fasting, repentance - Sacrifice of Atonement | - Judgement of God |
| Tabernacles (<i>Sukkot</i>) | 15-22 Tishri | - Thanksgiving for harvest - God's provision in the desert | - Millennial Kingdom - Marriage of the Lamb |

Notice that the prophetic meanings of the first four *mo’edim* were fulfilled at *Yeshua*'s first coming. However, the last three *mo’edim* have yet to be fulfilled. Do you think that the time for the fulfillment of these final feasts is near?

For many believers, when they first come into an understanding of the Hebrew roots of their faith, they begin to walk out this new understanding by observing God's *mo’edim* as laid out in this section of **Leviticus**. This often leads to passionate discussions with relatives and acquaintances. While it's always good to work to improve our walk with our heavenly father, it's important to remember that the commandment to love one another is a key aspect of that walk.

Digging deeper

1. The chart on the previous page shows the memorial and prophetic meaning of each of the annual *mo'edim*. However, **Leviticus 23:3** names the *Shabbat* as the first *mo'ed*. Can you think of any appropriate memorial and prophetic meanings for *Shabbat*? (Hint: See **2 Peter 3:8**)

2. The seventh chapter of **John** records *Yeshua's* participation in the celebration of *Sukkot* in Jerusalem. Does this passage take on any additional significance after your study of the feasts in **Leviticus**?

For further study, see

Haftarah : Jeremiah 46:13-28

Brit Hadashah : Luke 2:22-24; John 19:31-37; Acts 13:16-17;
Revelation 8:6 – 9:12; 16:1-21