THE APPONTED FEASTS OF THE LORD

Leviticus 23:1-44

Key Verse: 2

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

This chapter is truly a revelatory chapter with implications of Christ’ death, burial and resurrection, the coming of the Holy Spirit, Christ’s returning, and his kingdom on earth. All these are hidden in Jewish yearly feasts written in this one chapter, Leviticus 23. We can see the whole picture of God’s redemptive history in this passage. It is likely that the entire history of God is in his hand. Let’s see this.

In verses 1 and 2 the LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the LORD, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies.’” In this chapter, the word “my appointed feast” or “the appointed feasts of the LORD” or “the LORD’s appointed feasts” is mentioned 5 times (2, 4, 37, 44). These feasts are different from human feasts. The celebration of any human feast is to remember certain past events and maintain precious lessons. But the celebration of the feasts originated from God are furthermore to anticipate the future events to be fulfilled until the end of the human history. From our standpoint, certain events were fulfilled and the rest will be fulfilled according God’s plan in his appointed times. More precisely, we can that these feasts are Jesus’ feasts.

Verse 3 says, “There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to the LORD.” The word “sabbath” is often used together with rest, solemn/complete rest, holy/sacred. The seventh day is a day of Sabbath rest, a Sabbath of solemn/complete rest, a day of sacred assembly, and a Sabbath to the LORD. Before mentioning the LORD’s appointed feasts, the LORD says of the Sabbath, Sabbath day. We know that the fourth of the Ten Commandments is “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” (Ex 20:8) or “Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” (Dt 5:12). In chapter 25, there is the term “Sabbath year” (In NIV 25:1, 6). Sabbath can be the seventh day or the seventh year. Keeping the seventh day as the Sabbath is to be the basic spirit of the feasts. As for us, it is to keep the Lord’s day, Sunday, to worship God wholly. We cannot stress too much the importance of Sunday worship in our Christian life. It is the time to renew our hearts and spirits and have rest in our souls through the wholehearted worship in Spirit and in truth.

Then in verses 4 and 5 it says, “These are the LORD’s appointed feasts, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times. The LORD’s Passover begins at twilight on the fourteen day of the first month.” Here we are to know that God changed the calendar they had been using into his calendar. It is written in Exodus 12:1-2, “The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, ‘This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year.” The seventh month would be the first month, named Abib or Nisan (post-exilic period). The first month would be the month of Exodus, signifying the beginning of the nation of Israel coming out of the slavery in Egypt by God’s mighty power. In that month, on the tenth day each family was to take care of a lamb, a year-old male without a defect until the fourteenth and slaughter the lamb at the twilight just before the fifteenth day. Then they would put the blood of the lamb on the top and sides of their doorposts, and the angel of death would pass over the house, while the angel killed all the firstborn of Egyptians. In this last plague. Pharaoh would yield to the LORD and let Israel go. This is the LORD’s Passover. In the New Testament, Jesus would be the Lamb of God, the Passover Lamb, dying on the cross for the sin of mankind. When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29). Paul said in 1 Corinthians 5:7, “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.” Peter said in 1 Peter 1:18-20, “…you were redeemed…with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.” The LORD’s Passover always falls on the 14th day of Nisan (Friday), in our calendar March/April and on that day at the twilight the lamb was slaughtered. The gospel writers specially wrote that when Jesus died on the cross, it was 3 in the afternoon on Friday just before the Sabbath day. This is truly amazing accuracy. It would be the most important single day in the history of mankind, the very day of God’s Son sacrificed for the sin of Adam’s race.

Exodos 12:1 – God changed calendar.

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| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | Civil Adm. Calendar |
| 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |  ReligiousCalendar |
| T’shrei | Heshivon | Kislev | Tebeth | Shevat | Adar | Nisan | Lyar | Sivan | Tamuz | Av | Ellil |  |
| 9-10 | 10-11 | 11-12 | 12-1 | 1-2 | 2-3 | 3-4 | 4-5 | 5-6 | 6-7 | 7-8 | 8-9 |  Gregoria Calendar |

Nisan (post-exilic period, Abib): Nehemiah 2:1; Esther 3:7 (first month)

Abib: Exodus 13:4; 23:5; 34:18; Deuteronomy 16:1

Sivan: Esther 8:9 (third month)

Tebeth: Esther 2:16 (tenth month)

Adar: Ezra 6:15; Esther 3:7; 8:12; 9:1, 15, 17, 19, 21 (twelfth month)

T’shrei, Ethanim: 1 King 8:2 (seventh month)

Kislev: Nehemiah 1:1; Zechariah 7:1 (ninth month)

Jesus’ death on the cross is the foundation of our faith and life in Christ and also Christian church. As we studied in Leviticus, this book starts with five offerings (burnt, grain, fellowship/peace, sin, and guilt), which all refers to Christ’s sacrifice, his total sacrifice on the cross with his whole blood shed. Also, the core of the holy life is the atonement of sin on the day of atonement, when the blood of a bull was sprinkled on the atonement cover/mercy seat in the Most Holy Place, and a scapegoat was sent into a solitary place of the desert. And it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life/soul (17:11). How can we imagine the amount of the blood of the countless animals for around 1500 years? Certainly, the flood of the blood refers to the blood of Christ, which is sufficient and pure enough to wash away all our sins and sufficient and pure to bring us into God’s presence. So the author of Hebrews says in 10:19-22, “Since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled…” What a grace and privilege in Christ Jesus our Lord! In this blessing, may we draw near and close to him!

In verses 6-8 it says, “on the fifteenth day of that month the LORD’s Feast of Unleavened Bread begins; for seven days you must eat bread made without yeast. On the first day, hold an assembly and do no regular work. For seven days present an offering made to the LORD by fire. And on the seventh day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work.” At the Last Supper Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body” (Mt 26:26). Jesus’ body would be buried in the tomb for three days after his death. The Feast of the Unleavened Bread when they were to eat the unleavened bread, may refer to the burial of Jesus. According to atheJewish historian Josephus, the Jews kept the Feast of the Unleavened bread by burying the unleavened bread under the ground for three days and eating it. The spiritual meaning of the burial is our old self being buried in the anticipation of rising with Jesus.

Now in verses 9-11, the LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. He is to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest to wave it on the day after the Sabbath. On the day you wave the sheaf…” This day of the firstfruits is the first day of the week, Sunday, the sixteenth day of Nisan, which is in the midst of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. The word “wave” is written 3 times. Waiving indicates sureness and participation. On that day of the month Jesus rose again after being in the tomb for three days as he promised. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:20, “Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” Jesus is the firstfruit of resurrection. So the feast of the firstfruits refer to Jesus’ resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the single greatest event in human history as the victory over death, and with the resurrection Christianity stands firm. It opens the door to the eternal kingdom of God, which is our living hope as Peter said in 1 Peter 1:3-4.

Our Christian life is dying with Jesus and being buried and rising with Jesus. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:31, “I die every day.” It is true that without death, there is no resurrection.” Time and again our life situation is like a deadened situation contrary to our expectation of favourable ones. God wants us to rise again and challenge any and every situation and live with resurrection faith day by day. With such faith, may we prepare for Clubs’ Day and see first year and some other students at our fall group Bible which will be led by Jemmie. Offering the firstfruits is one’s expression of love for God and thanks to him and faith in him. Interestingly, offering the firstfruits is related to the resurrection. May we know this spiritual secret that when we offer to God the firstfruits in terms of time and materials and everything, we can be victorious and abundant in God’s provision. This is the reason Jesus said, “Seek first his kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be given to him” (Mt 6:33).

Then in verses 15-17 it says, “From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the Lord. From wherever you live, bring two loaves made of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour, baked with yeast, as a wave offering of firstfruits to the LORD.” Here, “new grain” is wheat while the first grain on the feast of firstfruits is barley. It is also considered firstfruits in verse 17. This new grain is followed by four months of summer harvest just before the autumn. It is the sixth of the third month (Sivan, in our calendar around May 6), counted off fifty days from the day of Jesus’ resurrection. It was the day when the promised Holy Spirit was poured out and the church began. This feast of weeks is so also called the Pentecost (in Greek Πεντηκοστης meaning fifties.) On this day, even the bread with yeast is baked in the fire, and the fellowship offering is made along with the burnt offering, the grain offering and the sin offering. The bread baked with yeast and the fellowship offering seem to anticipate the fellowship between the Jews and Gentiles in the church through the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus. Paul said in Ephesians 3:6, “This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel members together of one body and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”

As there were four months for the summer harvest starting from the feast of weeks before the feast of trumpets, there will be a time of spiritual harvest for the Gentiles through the work of the Holy Spirit from the time of Pentecost to the time of Christ’s returning. This is as Jesus said in Acts 1:8, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.” Here, in the passage between the end of the Feast of Weeks and just before the Feast of Trumpets it is written in verse 22, “When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God.” This is an excellent expression of the time of the harvest for the Gentiles. From the viewpoint of God’s history we are living in this period waiting for our Lord Jesus’ coming back. We again remember what Peter said at the time of the Pentecost quoting the words of Joel 2:28-29, “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy” (Ac 2:17-18). We also cannot forget the words of God in Amos 8:11-13, “‘The days are coming,’ declares the Sovereign LORD, ‘when I will send a famine through the land—not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it. In that day, the lovely young women and strong young men will faint because of thirst.” May we believe this and be prepared more and more to teach the very words of God for young people who would have a great hunger and thirst for the word of God.

Now in verses 23-25 it says, “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites: “On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. Do no regular work, but present an offering made to the LORD by fire.”’” This feast of the trumpet is Hebrew, *Rosh HaShanah*. This feast refers to Jesus’ second coming. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” Also Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, “Listen, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.” What a glorious hope! May we have this hope in our hearts!

In verses 26 and 27 the LORD said to Moses, “The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves…” This is called *Yom Kippur* for the Jews. When we refer to Daniel and Revelation there will be seven years of tribulation, which is also called Jacob’s trouble in Jeremiah 30:7. In those years, there will be a nation-wise repentance for the Israelites. It is written in Zechariah 12:10-12, “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great…The land will mourn.” And in 13:1, “On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.” The LORD says further in Zechariah 13:8-9. “In the whole land two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The LORD is our God.’” Paul also clearly said in Romans 10:25-26, “I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery; brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved…”

Then in verses 33-35 the LORD said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites: ‘On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the LORD’s Feast of Tabernacle begins, and it lasts for seven days.” This feast is also called the feast of Ingathering (Ex 23:16) as the fall harvest including fruits. It is really the feast of celebration (3 times written in 39, 41 (2)) and rejoicing (40). Especially verse 41 says, “celebrate it in the seventh month, which was the first month in their civil administrative calendar. This is to remember their time in the desert living in the booths after coming out of Egypt (42-43). The Feast of the Tabernacle refers to Christ’s kingdom, as his coming with his holy angels and saints to the earth. He will reign for a thousand years according to Revelation 20, and this kingdom will be ushered into the eternal kingdom of God in the New Jerusalem in a new heaven and a new earth. All the human kingdoms will be destroyed but the kingdom of Christ will last forever. It is as written in Revelation 11:15, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.”

As we studied there is man’s calendar and then there’s God’s calendar. In God’s calendar, we see the amazing management of God revealed in his yearly calendar which became the calendar of his people. In Greek, there are two words for “time”, one is χρονος meaning chronological time, and the other καιρος, meaning the time of occasion and opportunity. Paul said in Ephesians 5:15-16, “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.” Here “the most of every opportunity” is “making the best use of time” or “making the most of your time” in other translations and here “time” is καιρος. May we live following God’s calendar and his time schedule with clear time sense on the foundation of Christ’s death and resurrection, in the leading and power of the Holy Spirit for the proclamation of the gospel in the glorious hope of Christ’s kingdom.