

# OpenTheo

## April 11th: Leviticus 23 & Mark 7:24—8:10

April 10, 2020



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The festal calendar of Israel. Jesus ministers to Gentiles.

Some passages referenced:

Exodus 31:12-17 (Sabbath as the sign of the covenant); Exodus 12:2 (the first month designated as a result of the Exodus); Numbers 28—29 (the appointed sacrifices for each feast); Exodus 16 (the gift of the manna, an omer a day); Joshua 5:10-12 (the cessation of the manna and food from the land); Numbers 15:2-5 (the law for the grain offering of a burnt offering of a lamb); Leviticus 2:14-16 (the manner of the grain offering); Leviticus 2:11 (prohibition upon leaven in grain offerings); Leviticus 25:8 (the Year of Jubilee); Acts 2 (the Day of Pentecost); Zechariah 14:9, 16-19 (the Feast of Booths and the nations); Numbers 29:12-34 (the sacrifices of the Feast of Booths); Exodus 12:37 (camping at Succoth); Exodus 13:20-22 (the pillar of cloud and fire at Succoth); Exodus 12:39 (the Feast of Unleavened Bread first celebrated at Succoth).

Isaiah 35:5-6 (prophecy concerning the healing of the deaf, dumb, and blind); Mark 8:22-26 (parallel account of healing the blind man).

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglican church.net/>).

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## Transcript

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Leviticus 23 Leviticus 23 Leviticus 23 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, These are the appointed feasts of the Lord, which you shall proclaim as times of holy convocation, for presenting to the Lord food offerings, burnt offerings, and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each on its proper day, besides the Lord's Sabbaths, and besides your gifts, and besides all your vow offerings, and besides all your freewill offerings, which you give to the Lord. On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the Lord seven days. On the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest.

And you shall take on the first day the fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees, and boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. You shall celebrate it as a feast to the Lord for seven days in the year. It is a statute forever throughout your generations.

You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt.

I am the Lord your God. Thus Moses declared to the people of Israel the appointed feasts of the Lord. Leviticus chapter 23 is the list of the feasts of Israel.

There is a connection between the feasts and the agricultural calendar. The natural rhythm of life in the land is connected with the celebrations of the feasts of the Lord. And there is also a connection between the agricultural calendar and redemptive history.

Not only is the agricultural calendar associated with specific divine feasts, those divine feasts themselves are connected with events that God performed for his people in their history. God appoints times and the Israelites must proclaim them as sacred occasions. Israel seemed to follow a broadly lunar calendar.

However, it's quite possible that this calendar had exactly 52 weeks, with extra days or an extra month being added every few years. Perhaps even 49 extra days every Jubilee year. If it is the case that every typical year had exactly 52 weeks, then the feasts would always be on the same day of the week.

Gordon Wenham suggests that this claim would be strengthened by the dates in the flood narrative. Leviticus 23 begins with the Sabbath, which seems strange because the Sabbath is a weekly thing, not an annual celebration. Yet the Sabbath is the key sign of the Mosaic covenant in Exodus 31, verses 12-17.

In many ways it's the fundamental feast. It's that from which all of the others are derived. This is particularly noticeable in the case of feasts such as the Feast of Weeks.

Sabbath is a time of remembrance and consecration. That principle of remembrance and consecration is expanded to include other events that are connected with times of harvest and in-gathering, but also which remember events of God in history, the way he has delivered his people. There are seven festivals in the year, again continuing the Sabbath theme.

Passover, Unleavened Bread, Weeks, Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Booths, and the day after the Feast of Booths. There are seven days of rest. The first and the last day of the Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the first day of the Feast of Booths, and the day after that feast.

Most of the feasts occur in the seventh month, again a Sabbath theme. The Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Booths are both seven days long. The sign of the Sabbath then is refracted into a calendar of annual feasts.

To these we can also add the sabbatical year and the year of Jubilee, which extend the Sabbath principle even further. The whole calendar is shaped by the principle of Sabbath, the seventh. The seventh day, the seventh year, the seventh month, we will see it everywhere we look.

The Sabbath is a time of complete cessation of regular work. A Sabbath of solemn rest is an intensified expression, as the term Sabbath itself meant rest, and the term translated solemn rest is extremely closely related to it. The first of the feasts is the Passover.

The Passover begins on the fourteenth day of the month at evening. The first month was designated as such on account of the Exodus in Exodus 12, verse 2. The Passover began with the sacrifice of the Passover lamb at twilight. The Passover was immediately followed by the pilgrimage feast of Unleavened Bread, which lasted for seven days.

On the pilgrimage feast, people had to travel to a divinely appointed location to celebrate them. The Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Booths were other pilgrimage feasts. Leavened bread had to be avoided, in part as a symbol of cutting off of the tradition of the past.

This feast commemorated the deliverance from slavery in Egypt, so they were cutting off the leaven of Egypt. For each day of the feast of Unleavened Bread, appointed sacrifices would be offered to the Lord. The sacrifices for the different feasts are laid out in Numbers chapter 28 and 29.

The Feast of Firstfruits was appointed for Israel to celebrate after they entered into the land. They would have to waive a sheaf of their harvest before the Lord, along with a male lamb without blemish, a grain offering of two-tenths of an ephor, and a fourth of a

hymn of a drink offering. This feast was celebrated on the day after the Sabbath.

This was likely the Sunday of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Although Joshua 5 might suggest the possibility that it was on the day after the Passover, so the first day of Unleavened Bread. It was at the beginning of the barley harvest.

So if Jesus' death was connected with the Passover sacrifice, his resurrection is associated with the Sunday of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, with the Feast of Firstfruits. This connection was recognised by the Apostle Paul, who spoke of Jesus as the firstfruits of the dead, the first offering of the awaited harvest of the general resurrection. The firstfruits offering is a sheaf, or an omer, of the firstfruits of the harvest.

Now why an omer? This isn't a word that we encounter often. The great majority of the biblical uses of this term are found in this chapter, or in Exodus chapter 16, where it refers to the omer that was the daily portion of the manna. And this connection is very suggestive.

Perhaps the purpose of the feast, in part, was to recall the provision of the food for the people in the wilderness, in the manna, and to connect it with the food in the land. Joshua chapter 5 verses 10-12 reads, So what happens is a transition from the manna to the fruit of the land, and recognising that the principle of divine provision that we see in the manna continues in the provision of food from the land. That's something that's secured by this practice of the offering of the omer.

It recalls the provision of the manna, and then it connects that with the provision of grain. At the beginning of the barley harvest every year then, Israel would be reminded of God's provision of their bread in the wilderness, and be taught to recognise that, even when settled in the land, that same principle of gracious divine provision applied. The accompanying grain offering is double the regular grain offering of the burnt offering of a lamb.

It's two efforts rather than one. The normal regulations are seen in Numbers chapter 15 verses 2-5, although the drink offering is the same. Leviticus chapter 2 verses 14-16 gives us a sense of how the grain offering would have been offered.

The next feast is the feast of weeks, and the importance of a system of sacrifices or festivals is that the meaning of things is to be sought not merely in underlying root meanings, but in the relationship that things have to each other. The feast of weeks is a feast numbered from the feast of firstfruits, with the counting of seven weeks. It illustrates the Sabbath principle once more.

The feast of weeks comes at the end of the grain harvest, which began with the barley harvest, and ends with the gathering of the wheat. It also involves a grain offering. The fact that this, like the feast of firstfruits, was on the first day of the week, suggests

themes of a new creation.

At this feast, there was a wave offering of two leavened loaves of bread, made with two tenths of an ephor of flour. Now that recalls the grain offering of verse 13, in the feast of firstfruits. The grain offering of the feast of firstfruits seems to have become two leavened loaves.

And the addition of leaven is surprising, considering the strict prohibition of leaven in grain offerings in Leviticus chapter 2 verse 11. Perhaps what we're seeing here is an exceptional case with the reintroduction of a principle of leaven at this feast. It's the only occasion where leaven is included in an offering, which suggests that the leaven is an important part of the meaning.

The feast of weeks also multiplies the sacrifice of the feast of firstfruits, with seven lambs a year old as burnt offerings instead of just one. A bull from the herd, and two rams as burnt offerings, along with a male goat of a sin offering, and two lambs as peace offerings. The feast of weeks, or Pentecost as we tend to call it, came to be associated with the time of the giving of the law, due to its timing.

Again, it's an agricultural feast that is connected with events in redemptive history. The seven sevens that are used to count should also remind us of the way that Sinai was a sort of great Sabbath. A couple of chapters later we have the Jubilee, and we should observe the similarities.

The feast of weeks involves the counting of seven weeks, and the year of Jubilee involves the counting of seven weeks of years, in chapter 25 verse 8, following the institution of the Sabbath year. The feast of weeks is a sort of annual version of the year of Jubilee in miniature. The feast of firstfruits comes after the counting of seven days, on the day after the Sabbath.

It is part of a seven day feast, of the feast of unleavened bread. And the feast of weeks comes after the counting of seven weeks. The year of Jubilee celebrated God's deliverance of his people, and his gift of the land to them.

The feast of weeks celebrates God's declaration of the liberation of his people at Sinai. It also focuses on the duty of those harvesting to leave the edges of their fields and the gleanings for the poor and the sojourner. Like the year of Jubilee, it protects the stake of the poor and the dispossessed in the land.

Now Christians obviously associate the feast of weeks as Pentecost. On this day the risen Christ, the one who is the Passover lamb sacrificed for us, who has risen as the firstfruits of those fallen asleep, gives his sevenfold sabbatical spirit to his bride the church. A new principle by which they will grow with the leaven of the spirit's work.

As the law was given at Sinai, so Christ gives the spirit to write the law upon our hearts

at Pentecost. A new tradition as it were. Leaven is a handing down of a tradition.

It's continued from loaf to loaf, and here we have this new leaven given to us. As Israel's liberation was declared at Sinai, so our liberation is declared as the realisation of Christ's exodus at Pentecost. As in Leviticus and other Old Testament teaching concerning Pentecost, the account of Pentecost in Acts 2 gives a lot of attention to the celebration of meals of joy and thanksgiving, and to the fact that all are to be provided for.

The feast of trumpets comes next. It's the day of solemn rest on which certain sacrifices, mostly ascension offerings, dedicating the nation to God, would be made. The day was a memorial, a day proclaimed with the blowing of trumpets which would muster the people and summon them to attention.

As a memorial it would recall people to the covenant, and also call upon the Lord to remember his covenant commitment to his people. This is one of the rare occasions in the law where we have sounds as part of the worship of God, apart from speech. We don't have music as part of the worship of God within the law for the most part.

We have bells upon the garments of the high priest, and we also have blowing of trumpets at key points. So maybe we should see in this an anticipation of a movement towards music. We may also think about the way that this sound, on the one hand, reminded the people of their covenant commitment and recalled them to faithfulness, but also called for God to act in remembrance of his covenant.

Maybe our music should be considered the same way. This day later became the Jewish New Year. However, we can see further significance in the fact that it is the beginning of the second half of the year.

The first month recalled the first departure from Egypt, and halfway through the year Israel is recalled to the work that God began in the Exodus. It is also, perhaps more significantly, the first day of the seventh month. It's the beginning of the sabbatical month, as it were.

So we should recognise Sabbath themes here also. And as the seventh month has most of the feasts, we should also appreciate that this is preparing the people for a period of feasting. The Feast of Trumpets is once again an expansion of the Sabbath principle.

The Day of Atonement is the feast that comes next. It was the great purification event that occurred every year, rebooting the sacrificial system. It was the day when the high priest went into the very presence of God.

The seventh month was a month of a number of key feasts, and the Day of Atonement's association with the Day of the Lord, with its cleansing and admission to the very presence of God, and its utter expulsion of those bearing sins from God's presence, is an event that anticipates the final great Sabbath, at the end of all things. The final feast of

the year is a strange one. Once again it's a feast of the seventh month.

It's the Feast of Booths. After Israel had gathered in the produce of the land, Israel had to gather fruit of splendid trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and rejoice before the Lord. This was seemingly another celebration of the fruitfulness of the land, now celebrating not the grain harvest, but other produce of the land.

As an ingathering festival, the Feast of Booths seems to be associated with the gift of rain, in Zechariah 14, verse 9 and 16 to 19, and also seems to have a significance for all of the nations. In Numbers 29, verses 12 to 34, where the list of sacrifices are given for this festival, we see that 70 bulls are sacrificed over the course of it, one for each of the nations. In Zechariah 14, we see the Feast of Tabernacles in an eschatological context.

And if the family of Egypt does not go up and present themselves, then on them there shall be no rain. There shall be the plague with which the Lord afflicts the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Booths. This shall be the punishment to Egypt, and the punishment to all the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Booths.

But the Feast of Booths, or Sakkoth, also looks back to Israel's experience in the wilderness. They had to dwell in temporary booths for seven days in commemoration of that. We should remember that Sakkoth was the site of Israel's first camp after leaving Egypt at the Passover.

Exodus 12, verse 37 reads, And the people of Israel journeyed from Ramesses to Sakkoth, about 600,000 men on foot, besides women and children. It is where they stayed on the night of the fifteenth day of the first month. But this is on the fifteenth day of the seventh month.

Why is that? Later on in the following chapter, in Exodus chapter 13, verse 22 we read, And they moved on from Sakkoth and encamped at Ethem, on the edge of the wilderness. And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

Sakkoth then is the first place where we read about the pillar of cloud and fire that accompanied them. Sakkoth is also the place where, surprisingly, Israel first celebrated the feast of unleavened bread. In Exodus chapter 12, verse 39, And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt.

For it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves. Again, this is strange, because the feast of unleavened bread is in the first month of the year. So what's going on? The feast

of unleavened bread focuses on the food of that first day of the Exodus journey.

The feast of booths focuses on the dwellings that they lived in. If unleavened bread involved the cutting off of the leaven of Egypt, booths was the first break that Israel had with the settled life beneath roofs that they had in Egypt. And God journeyed with them in the cloud.

Every year, Israel was to replay this, to recall the trust that they had shown that first night of leaving their Egyptian dwellings and following God into the wilderness. Why was it celebrated when it was then? Why not in the first month? The clue is found in recognising that the feast of unleavened bread, connected with the exact same time in Israel's history, begins on the 15th day of the first month and runs for seven days. The feast of booths begins on the 15th day of the seventh month and runs for seven days.

They are divided by six months, by exactly half of a year. They mirror each other. If the feast of unleavened bread begins the months of gathering the grain and produce of the land, the feast of ingathering comes at its conclusion.

And they can also be seen to be bookends at either end. The feast of unleavened bread begins with this feast at the very beginning, the feast of Passover, for one day. And the feast of booths has one day just after it, the eighth day, where there's another holy convocation and food offering.

So at the very conclusion of the year, at the point where they might be most tempted to think themselves self-sufficient, the Lord returns his people to the very beginning. He returns them to that point that they remember when they first came out of Egypt. He reminds them of the trust and complete dependence that first led them to follow him into the wilderness, of his glory cloud that accompanied and sheltered them, and of the clouds to which they still look to for rain.

A question to consider, how does the mapping of redemptive history onto the seasons and the year shape Israel's conception of God and their sense of their relationship to their history? How can we learn from this in our approach to the church calendar? Mark chapter 7 verse 24 to chapter 8 verse 10 Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth, and she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. And he said to her, Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. But she answered him, Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.

And he said to her, For this statement you may go your way, the demon has left your daughter. And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone. Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.



And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, That is, be opened.

And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.

And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak. In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days, and have nothing to eat.

And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way, and some of them have come from far away. And his disciples answered him, How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place? And he asked them, How many loaves do you have? They said, Seven. And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground, and he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and they set them before the crowd.

And they had a few small fish, and having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. And they ate, and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full, and there were about four thousand people, and he sent them away.

And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples, and went to the district of Dalmanutha. At the end of Mark chapter 7, Jesus goes to the region of Tyre and Sidon. This might recall the story of Elijah, who stayed with the widow of Zarephath, and also raised her child from the dead, much as Jesus delivers the child of this Syrophenician woman living in that region.

The woman begged Jesus to deliver her daughter, and Jesus seems to deny her request, telling her that the children should be fed first, that it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. Jesus doesn't send her away, but he gives her a seemingly very harsh response, possibly quoting a popular proverb, rebuffing her with an unflattering statement about Gentiles that seems to place them outside of the realm of God's blessings. Jesus' mission is not to people in general, but to Israel especially.

Although the claim that the children should be fed first holds the door open a crack, the woman however responds to Jesus' presentation of an obstacle by taking that obstacle and turning it around to her benefit. By this point we should have picked up on the fact that Jesus seldom goes out of his way to heal people, nor does he make things easy for

the people who want to be healed by him. People have to come to Jesus.

Those wanting healing or deliverance often face obstacles or initial rejection, and have to beg and persist in order to get anything. But we must recognise that such dogged persistence is exactly what Jesus wants from them. In presenting these sorts of obstacles, Jesus is calling for strength of faith in the petitioner, expecting them to wrestle with him until they get their answer.

The obstacles aren't proof that Jesus doesn't want to heal and deliver people. Rather his healings and deliverance is called for faith from the recipients. Where such persistent faith is lacking, people are not healed.

This is an example of the sort of prayer that we should practice. The deliverance of the daughter of the Tsar of Venetian woman is also an anticipation of Christ's deliverance going to the Gentiles more generally, and the surrounding context is very much focused on Gentiles. Jesus continues to travel in Gentile regions, in the region of Decapolis, and there's a deaf man with a speech impediment brought to him, and people beg him to lay his hands on this man.

Once again, the begging suggests the importance of persistence. Jesus takes the man away from the crowd, puts his fingers in his ears, and using spittle, presumably on his finger, touches the man's tongue. He looks up to heaven, sighs, and speaks a word of healing in Aramaic.

Once again the original Aramaic of a powerful healing utterance is preserved for us by Mark, just as he did in the case of Jairus' daughter. The man's ears are opened, and his tongue is unshackled, suggesting the removal of bonds maybe that Satan has placed upon him. All of this recalls Isaiah 35, verses 5-6.

We should read this story alongside the parallel story a few verses later, in chapter 8, verses 22-26. The parallels between these two stories are quite pronounced when we look closely, and it should be noted that it is also a fulfillment of Isaiah 35, verses 5-6, the eyes of the blind being opened. We should remember how important Isaiah's prophecies are for Mark within his gospel.

Having instructed the healed deaf mute not to tell anyone, the released tongue of the man cannot help but declare what Jesus has done for him, and the people's response is astonishment and praise. He has done all things well. After this, Jesus is once again surrounded by a great crowd that lacks food, and we have another miraculous feeding account.

In an event highly reminiscent of the earlier feeding of the 5,000, Jesus repeats the pattern of the Lord's Supper, in verse 6, once again making his disciples minister to a large flock. However, this time the flock seems to be largely Gentile. The similarities with

the earlier feeding of the 5,000 suggest that we are expected to recognise a connection between the two, and that is underlined later on in this chapter.

These are two parts of a single story. Both of these events anticipate the future ministry of the disciples, as they will minister Jesus to the multitudes, both Jews and Gentiles. This seems to be in a largely Gentile region.

It continues the Gentile focus of the last two stories. Jesus feeds not only Jews, but presumably many Gentiles too. We should think back to the conversation with the Syrophenician woman.

Gentiles, who might be dismissed by dogs by some, are here feasting on the same food as the children had enjoyed. There is the feeding of the children first, and now the feeding of those who are the Gentiles. The first feeding involves the feeding of 5,000 people.

This may be connected with Israel's military ordering. And there are 12 baskets gathered up. Here there are 4,000 people, maybe connected with the four corners of the earth, and there are 7 baskets gathered up.

The 5,000 is the primary act, but the Gentiles are blessed with the Jews, and there are leftovers for others. There is a superabundance, more than enough for others besides Israel. There are 5 loaves in the first feeding, there are 7 loaves in the second.

Altogether that makes 12 loaves. 12 loaves represented Israel in the showbread. We've already noted that the 5 loaves might be connected with the 5 loaves taken of the showbread by David in 1 Samuel 21.

So together the loaves given to these two groups make a new 12. There are 12 baskets gathered up on the first occasion, and then 7 baskets gathered up on the second occasion. 12 for Israel, perhaps 7 for the fullness of the nations.

These are both significant numbers in Scripture, numbers that suggest some type of fullness. 12 associated with Israel, 7 associated with the days of creation, the scope of creation more generally. Jesus is bringing together a new people, and all of these events connected with the Gentiles suggest that they are an important part of what Christ will perform, and his disciples will be ministering this.

A question to consider. What are some of the ways in which these stories give us an image of the Gentiles' spiritual participation in the awaited Kingdom of God?