

## Special Observances and Celebrations in Leviticus

### THREE REGULAR PERIODS OF REST:

#### *Sabbath Day*

- Observed every seventh<sup>i</sup> day
- Commemorated the completion of creation by God, who rested on the seventh day
- Description: Day of rest with spiritual significance of resting in Christ's adequacy for salvation and for sanctification

#### *Sabbath Year*

- Observed every seventh year<sup>ii</sup>
- Commemorated the principle of "resting" as the means of finding freedom
- Description: All debts were cancelled (Dt 15:2), slaves who were fellow Israelite were set free (Dt 15:12), and the fields were not sown or plowed (Lev 25:4), all of which prevented ruination through debt. The Sabbath Year encouraged trust in God to provide and increased the land's fertility.

#### *Year of Jubilee*

- Observed every 50<sup>th</sup> Year (the year following seven periods of seven years)
- Commemorated the giving of Canaan to the tribes of Israel, with permanent land inheritances assigned to each family in each tribe
- Description: All land was returned to its original owner, debts were cancelled, and all Israelite slaves were set free, to ensure long-term family stability and dependence on God.

### THREE GREAT FEASTS<sup>iii</sup>:

#### *Tabernacles* (Feast of Booths, Feast of Ingathering, *Sukkoth*)

- Observed annually at plowing time (first month on the civil calendar, seventh month on the religious calendar)
- Commemorated Israelites' wanderings in wilderness living in tents (booths/tabernacles)
- Description: Lasted for eight days, starting and ending with days of Sabbath (rest), including a sacred assembly on the eighth day

#### *Passover* (Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of Firstfruits, *Pesach*)

- Observed at the beginning of every barley harvest season (seventh month on the civil calendar, first month on the religious calendar)
- Commemorated deliverance from Egypt, haste in leaving Egypt without time for bread to be leavened, and thanksgiving for harvest.
- Description: The first day was the observance of Passover (with the important Passover meal), followed by a week of celebrating the Feast of Unleavened Bread; Firstfruits<sup>iv</sup> was a day of thanksgiving for the first sheaf harvested. It fell during the Passover celebration on the first day after the Sabbath.

#### *Pentecost* (Feast of Weeks, Feast of Harvest, *Shavuot*, Hebrew "Thanksgiving")<sup>v</sup>

- Observed at the end of every harvest season (ninth month on the civil calendar, third month on the religious calendar), fifty days (day following 7 weeks) after Firstfruits was celebrated during the Passover
- Commemorated the wheat harvest, around two months after the earlier barley harvest (recognized at Firstfruits)
- Description: While Leviticus 23 names elaborate sacrifices to be made, Deuteronomy 16:10 indicates the offering was to be a freewill offering in proportion to the Lord's blessings.

**TWO HOLY DAYS<sup>vi</sup>:***Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)*

- Observed on the first month of the civil calendar, the seventh month of the religious calendar
- Commemorated: Atoning for sin by the presentation of sacrifices by the High Priest on behalf of the nation.
- Description: The sacrifices included a sin offering for the High Priest's own sin, followed by the sacrifice of one goat for the sin of the entire community and the releasing of a second goat into the desert as a "scapegoat," which bore the peoples sins away with it.

*Feast of Trumpets (New Year's Day)*

- Observed on the first month of the civil calendar, seventh month of the religious calendar
- Commemorated: New Year's Day on the civil calendar
- Description: A day for the sounding of trumpets and the bringing of sacrifices. This celebration marked the beginning of multiple celebrations in the seventh month on the religious calendar

---

<sup>i</sup> The number seven is significant in the Bible. It seems to represent completeness or perfection.

<sup>ii</sup> The seventh month (on the religious calendar) was also sacred in that both of the two Holy Days and the eight days celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles all fell in this one month – days 1, 10, and 15-22 of this month were all days of special observation.

<sup>iii</sup> All Israelite males were to appear before God in Jerusalem for these three annual feasts.

<sup>iv</sup> This is the day on which Jesus was resurrected (see Matthew 28:1).

<sup>v</sup> See Acts 1:3-5 and 2:1-4. Pentecost was the day the Holy Spirit was given to believers, as Jesus foretold.

<sup>vi</sup> Three additional Holy Days appeared later in Israel's history:

*Purim (from the time of Esther, when the Jews were saved from annihilation), Hanukkah (from the years between the Testaments, when the temple was rededicated), and Tish'a B'Av (the ninth day of the month of Av, commemorates the destruction of the first and second Temples in Jerusalem)*