

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.

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.

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?

Only for the death of a “close relative” might a priest make himself unclean by touching the body or by other mourning customs (tearing one’s clothing, putting ashes on one’s head, etc.). Close relatives were mother, father, son, daughter, brother or unmarried sister living with him.

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?

Priests were not to shave their heads or their beards and were not to cut themselves. These could be expressions of grief over the death of a relative or they might have been worship rituals for pagan gods.

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?

A priest could not marry a prostitute or a divorced woman. Because priests were to be holy before God, their wives had to be perfect and unblemished also, i.e. a virgin. If a priest’s daughter became a prostitute, she was to be put to death.

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?

The high priest was not allowed to mourn any death. His first calling was to minister to God and traditional signs of mourning were not allowed. (This helps explain Aaron’s actions after the death of Nadab & Abihu.) The high priest could only marry a virgin Israelite.

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?

A man with any deformities or with any open sores was disqualified from serving as priest. He was allowed to participate in sacred meals but could not serve at the altar or in the tent of meeting.

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?

Uncleanness was caused by skin diseases, open sores or bodily discharges, touching a corpse or unclean animal or touching an unclean person. Such uncleanness was remedied by bathing and waiting until sundown.

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?

The immediate family consisted of those people (including slaves) who lived permanently in the priest's house. A violator had to make restitution, adding a fifth to it.

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?

The sacrifice had to be an unblemished ox, sheep, or goat. It was permissible to present an imperfect ox or sheep as a free will offering only (not in fulfillment of a vow).

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?

An animal must be at least 8 days old to be acceptable. An animal and its mother were not to be sacrificed on the same day. Although the reason is unclear, it may have been to assure that the sacrifices were counted as two sacrifices and not just one.

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"?

The first mo'ed, or appointed time of God is the Sabbath, or Shabbat. This reinforces the importance God places on the Shabbat. On all appointed times, there was to be no work done and the Israelites were to assemble together to worship.

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?

The first feast was Passover, or Pesach, at twilight on 14 Nisan (Abib), which commemorated the “passing over” of the Angel of death in Egypt. From 15 to 21 Nisan was the Feast of Unleavened Bread, with a Shabbat held on the 15th and the 21st. During this time unleavened bread was eaten to remind the Israelites of the haste with which they left Egypt.

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?

The 3rd feast was Firstfruits, or Bikkurim, celebrating the firstfruits of the barley harvest. It occurred on the day after the Shabbat which fell during the week of Pesach.

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?

The 4th feast was Weeks, or Shavu’ot, which was 50 days after Firstfruits. In addition to a sacred assembly, the Israelites offered several grain and animal sacrifices. This feast occurred at the end of the barley harvest.

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

The Feast of Trumpets, or Yom Teru’ah, (on 1 Tishri) included the sounding of trumpets.

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

The Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, (on 10 Tishri) was a solemn and included fasting.

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?

Tabernacles (Sukkot), from 15-22 Tishri, involved living outside in booths made of tree branches and commemorated Israel’s escape from Egypt.

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?

The lamps in the tabernacle were fueled by clear pressed olive oil. It was the high priest's (Aaron's) job to tend the lamps, keeping them burning continually.

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?

Twelve loaves were arranged in 2 rows (or stacks) of 6 loaves each on the table of showbread along with incense. The bread represented the 12 tribes of Israel and the incense represented prayer.

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

The bread was placed on the table every Sabbath by the high priest (Aaron) and belonged to him and his family. It was to be eaten in a holy place.

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?

The son of an Israelite mother and an Egyptian father had a fight with an Israelite. During the course of the fight, the man blasphemed God's name with a curse. After a time, God instructed Moses to have the blasphemer stoned outside the camp. Those who had heard him blaspheme were to place their hands on his head (transferring the curse or the guilt?). God considers blasphemy (using his name as a curse) to be a serious offense.

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?

The passage in verses 17-22 is often misunderstood to mean that bodily harm is to be inflicted on those who injure others. The Jewish sages point out that what is intended here is that one must make appropriate restitution for the injury that he has caused others. One possible reason that this passage is included at this point is that it is the basis for the death penalty, life for life, which was carried out on the blasphemer. It is difficult to see that one who curses another using God's name has committed a crime worthy of death, but that is definitely a conclusion that can be drawn.

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**)

For the memorial meaning, one obvious possibility is to remember that God set apart (sanctified) the Shabbat at creation and commanded us to observe it (the fourth commandment). For the prophetic meaning, one possibility rests on 2 Peter 3:8, where Peter states that with God, a thousand years are as a day and a day as a thousand years. Given that Adam was created approximately 6 "days" ago (6000 years), then we should be nearing the seventh day (the millennial reign of the Messiah) at any time now.

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**?

*The "water libation" was a manmade addition to the Sukkot festival. On each of the seven days of the festival, a libation of water was made together with the libation of wine at the morning service. The water was drawn in a golden flagon holding three logs from the pool of Siloam. It was carried to the water gate of the Temple where the shofar was sounded. The officiating priest then took it up the ramp of the altar and turned to his left where there were two silver bowls. One was for water and the other was for wine, and both libations were poured out simultaneously. Since this water libation is not mentioned in the Bible, the rabbis declared that it was a Mosaic law from Sinai or an institution of the prophets even though there was no justification for it in the Pentateuch itself. The water libation was offered at this time of the year "in order that the new rainy season would be blessed." The Sadducees strongly opposed this innovation and totally denied its validity. The refusal of King Alexander Yannai, Sadducean high priest (107–76 B.C.E.), to make the libation caused a bloody riot in the Temple. When he contemptuously poured the water on his feet, all those present in the Temple area pelted him with their etrogim. Subsequently, the rabbis required the officiating priest to raise his hand when he poured out the water at the libation so that it could be observed that he was properly discharging the precept. It was at this point in the proceedings that *Yeshua* proclaimed, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink ..."*

(John 7:37-39).

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