

THE BIG JOURNEY

from Creation

to New Creation



seven ► The Wedding in the Wilderness



A full-scale replica of the Tabernacle, Timna Park, Israel.

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The marriage ceremony

After their rescue from Egypt, God's people don't go straight to the Promised Land. They go through the wilderness to Mount Sinai to meet with God (Exodus 19.4). A few weeks' journey from where they crossed the Sea of Reeds, and God's people are encamped at the base of this mountain.

But before they travel to the Promised Land, God brings His people into covenant relationship with Himself. This covenant was like a *marriage*. God became their Husband (see, for example Isaiah 54.5, Jeremiah 31.32). And, in Peter Leithart's words, "[Moses is the minister officiating at the wedding.](#)" Remember what we learned in the very first session - the Bible story is at its heart a love story (compare Jeremiah 31.3).

❖ **The wedding ceremony** Firstly God makes a solemn covenant with His people - just as a man and a woman make vows to each other at a wedding.

❖ **The wedding reception** Then God and representatives of His people eat and drink together - just like a wedding reception.

❖ **Their new home together** After their marriage, a husband and wife live together. Accordingly, God makes

arrangements to live together with His Bride, Israel. He shows Moses the blueprint for a beautiful new home where He will live among His people. This home is a tent called the Tabernacle. God Himself will live there. And not only that, God wants to *share* His home with His people and have fellowship with them there. So He makes provision for special representatives of His people - the priests - to come in and worship and serve Him in the Tabernacle.

Exchanging vows

First, God promises that - if His people remain obedient to Him - they'll be His treasured possession (Exodus 19.3-6). In turn, the Israelites commit themselves to serve Him and obey Him (Exodus 19.8). Mankind disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. Now God's new mankind promise to obey Him - reversing humanity's act of rebellion.

Exodus 20.1-23.33 are the 'marriage' vows themselves. These vows are supplemented and expanded by various other passages in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, which we collectively call 'the Law'. In these passages, God vows to love and care for His people, defeat their enemies, lead them into His Promised Land, and bless them abundantly. On their part, Israel is to love, serve and

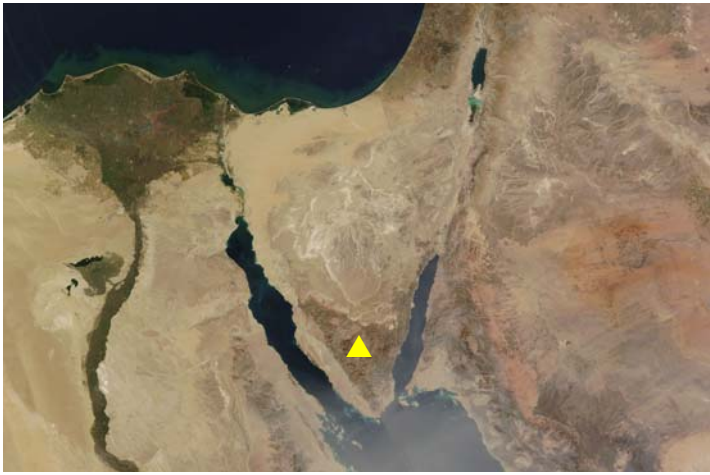


Image by NASA/MODIS.

The Sinai Peninsula from space: the yellow triangle marks the approximate position of the traditional location of Mount Sinai

obey God. God's Law shows them how they can do this.

After God sets out His commandments, there is a solemn ceremony (Exodus 24.4-8). This is the moment when the 'marriage' between God and His people is sealed. Israel vows to obey God's Law (Exodus 24.3). Then animals are sacrificed, and Moses throws blood from these sacrifices against the altar (representing God's presence). Moses reads the Book of the Covenant (presumably Exodus 20.1-17, 20.22-23.19) to the assembled multitude, who again vow to obey God. Moses also splashes blood over the book (Hebrews 9.19-20) and over the people.

This covenant between God and Israel is sealed with blood. Blood is really important in the Bible. Blood carries life-giving oxygen and nutrients to every part of a body; as the Bible puts it, *"the life of a creature is in the blood"* (Leviticus 17.11, NIV). Blood represents life. And when blood is shed, it represents life being poured out and brought to an end in death.

The blood shows that God and His people are now joined in the closest possible bond of commitment, loyalty, and faithfulness. Breaking the covenant would be an act of betrayal. If either party ever broke the covenant, they - like the animal that shed its blood in the covenant ceremony - would have to die.

We know, of course, that Israel - and each individual member of that nation - did break the covenant. Each Israelite should have suffered the death penalty due to them according to the covenant. But God accepted the death of animals instead - hence the comprehensive and costly system of sacrifices detailed particularly in Leviticus,

and which we'll look at in this session. Those sacrifices prefigured Jesus's sacrifice on the Cross. God Himself, in Christ Jesus, would one day suffer the death required under the terms of that covenant.

The wedding reception

After the wedding, Moses ascends Mount Sinai, accompanied by Aaron and two of his sons, and 70 elders who represent the whole nation (Exodus 24.9-11). There they see God. Under His feet is a pavement like sapphire, clear as the sky. Years later, Ezekiel and John the apostle were treated to this sublime spectacle of God Himself seated on His throne (Ezekiel 1.26-28; Revelation 4.1-6). Here was privilege indeed. God lays a banquet before them, and they eat and drink in His presence (Exodus 24.11).

In those days a covenant was typically concluded by eating a meal together. In Bernard Bell's words, *"The meal that they enjoyed was a fellowship meal in God's presence, a meal which sealed the covenant in an even more profound way than did the blood thrown upon the altar and upon the people."* Douglas Stuart explains: *"In the ancient world (and many places in the modern world) people would not eat together if they were not somehow allies or family."* Through the blood ceremony and the meal eaten in His presence, God adopts Israel into His family circle.

God's new home

God now makes plans to come and live among His people. He doesn't want to stay in splendid isolation, up there on Mount Sinai (see Exodus 24.17). He doesn't want His people to have to make a pilgrimage to reach Him. He wants to live as close to them as He can possibly get.

So God tells Moses to make a home where He can live among His people (Exodus 25.8), and gives him the blueprint (Exodus 25.10-27.19; 30.1-10,17-38). God was going to live in a tent, just like His people did. His tent could be dismantled and re-erected just like theirs. God was going to travel with them to the Promised Land.

So God calls Bezalel and fills him with His Spirit, giving him *"ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship"* (Exodus 31.1-11). God appoints Oholiab as Bezalel's helper. These two men, assisted by other *"able men"*, whom God had *"given . . . ability"*, were to make the Tabernacle and all its furniture, the priests' clothes, the anointing oil and the incense (Exodus 31.1-11, 35.10-19, 35.30-36.1).



View from Mount Moses (the mountain traditionally thought to be Mount Sinai).

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God's desert home – the Tabernacle



Image © Petri Paavola

Model of the Tabernacle. Note the altar of burnt offering and the laver in the courtyard, with the animals due for sacrifice. The model includes tables for processing the sacrifices – it's not known if the Tabernacle actually had these.

The people supply the materials (Exodus 35.4-9,20-29, 36.2-7) - doubtless largely plundered from the Egyptians (Exodus 3.21-22; 11.2-3, 12.35-36). Then the skilled craftsmen make the Tabernacle and all its furnishings and utensils (Exodus 36.8-38.31). Finally, all is ready (Exodus 39.32-43) and the Tabernacle is erected (Exodus 40.1-11,16-33).

When all is complete, God moves into His new home: *“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”* (Exodus 40.34-35 and see Numbers 9.15).

Foot Note Returning to the Garden

After Adam and Eve disobeyed God, He had to expel them from His garden home (Genesis 3.24). What takes place here in Sinai is a big step towards reversing this tragedy. God is bringing people back into His home – as far as He can before Jesus opens the way into God's presence fully.

Once God lived with mankind in the Garden of Eden. Now He comes to live with His new mankind – His people Israel - in the Tabernacle. In fact, as we shall see, there are strong links between the Tabernacle and the Garden of Eden.

The cloud was the same as the one that guided and protected them from before they even crossed the Red Sea (Exodus 13.21-22, and see Exodus 14.19-20,24, 16.10, 33.9-10, 34.5). Throughout their wilderness journeys, God's cloud by day and His fire by night led them through the wilderness (Exodus 40.38, Numbers 9.15-22 and see Numbers 14.14). The cloud and fire was a visible manifestation of God Himself! Throughout each day and right through each night, the children of Israel could see God present among them. How wonderful!

The Tabernacle was a very special place. Its frame, furniture and hangings were made with the most exquisite craftsmanship and artistry - the very best that people, filled with skill by God's Spirit, could achieve.

The outer court

The Tabernacle itself was surrounded by a large rectangular courtyard measuring around 150 by 75 feet, and bounded

by a white linen screen about 7 or 8 feet high to shield the courtyard from view. An entrance on the eastern side was hung with a screen of blue, purple and scarlet yarns and fine linen, embroidered with needlework.

In the courtyard was the bronze **altar of burnt offering**, where the sacrifices were offered, and a **basin**, where the priests washed.

The tent

The Tabernacle itself was about 45 feet long and 15 feet both wide and high. It was like a frame tent. (The picture on page 7 is of a model that shows the layout from above, with the coverings of the tent removed to show the inside.)

The innermost covering of the tent was of fine linen, and blue, purple and scarlet yarns, with cherubim worked into them. This covering was overlaid with a protective covering of goats' hair. This in turn was overlaid by two coverings of skins, the inner of rams' skins and the outermost of another kind of leather (probably from the skins of an aquatic creature, such as the sea cow).

The whole tent was supported on a lightweight framework of wooden boards (probably open frames rather than solid boards) overlaid with gold. It was sturdy, yet easily dismantled and re-erected.

The tent's interior was split in two by a screen or 'veil', of the same materials, colour and design as the innermost coverings of the Tabernacle. The larger compartment at the front (about 30 feet long) was the Holy Place, whilst the smaller innermost chamber (about 15 feet long, wide and high) was the Most Holy Place. The entrance to the Holy Place from the courtyard was protected by a screen similar to the one at the entrance of the courtyard itself.

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Courtyard of the full-scale replica of the Tabernacle, Timna Park, Israel, showing the altar of burnt offering, the laver behind it, and the curtained entrance to the tent itself.

The Holy Place

Like our homes, God's home was furnished. In the Holy Place there was a **candlestick**, a **table** and an **altar**.

On the left there was a golden seven-branched **candlestick** (or *menorah* in Hebrew) bearing seven lamps (Exodus 25.31-40). The lamps were to be alight throughout each night (Exodus 27.20-21).



Image © Brian Morley www.BrianMorley.com and flickr.com/BrianMorley

Interior of the Holy Place in the full-scale replica of the Tabernacle, Timna Park, Israel. Note the candlestick, table of showbread and the altar of incense. A model of a priest stands to the left; behind him is a model of the High Priest.

On the right was the **table**, which was always to have twelve loaves of bread on it (Exodus 25.23-30, Leviticus 24.5-9, Numbers 4.7). This bread was called the showbread, or *“bread of the Presence”*, because it was laid out in God’s presence. The loaves were accompanied by vessels that included *“the bowls, and the flagons for the drink offering”* – the drink offerings were presumably wine. Every Sabbath, these loaves were exchanged for new ones, and the old ones were given to the priests to eat.

We’ve seen how chosen representatives of Israel enjoyed a meal in God’s presence on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24.9-11); it showed they were now adopted into God’s family circle. Now God allows chosen representatives of His family regularly to enter His home and be in His presence. There in His Tabernacle home, week by week, priests ate at His table as an act of fellowship with Him. And these meals point us forward to the Lord’s supper, in which God’s redeemed sons and daughters eat and drink in the presence of our Elder Brother Jesus.

The **altar** was positioned in front of the veil shielding the Most Holy Place (Exodus 30.1-8, 34-38). Incense was offered on it day by day, each morning and evening.

The Most Holy Place



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A replica of the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place of the reconstructed Tabernacle in Timna Park, Israel. The lid (or ‘mercy seat’) of the Ark is slightly open to show the interior, which would have contained (1) the tablets written with the Law, (2) Aaron’s staff that budded and (3) a golden urn containing a portion of manna (Hebrews 9.4, see Exodus 25.16, 40.20, Exodus 16.33-34, and Numbers 17.10-11)

The only piece of furniture in the Most Holy Place was the **Ark of the Covenant**. This was an acacia-wood box

overlaid with gold. On this box was a slab of pure gold, called the **mercy seat** (ESV) or **atonement cover** (NIV). The Tabernacle was God’s royal palace; the Most Holy Place was His throne room; and the mercy seat was the footstool of His throne (see 1 Chronicles 28.2).

On either end of the mercy seat was a golden cherub; these cherubim stretched their wings over the mercy seat, as if to watch over the place of His presence. God was enthroned on these cherubim (for example, 2 Samuel 6.2 and Psalm 99.1, and see Exodus 25.22, Numbers 7.89). From here He reigned over His people, and over the whole Earth.

Foot Note A prototype of the new creation

The Most Holy Place was a cube, about 15 feet high, wide and long. The Most Holy Place in Solomon’s Temple was also a cube (1 Kings 6.20). New Jerusalem is a cube, too – its height and length and breadth are equal (Revelation 21.16).

These are the only places in the Bible where we meet this symbolic shape. The Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle and in the Temple foreshadowed New Jerusalem. This city is the final and eternal Most Holy Place. Like the Most Holy Place, New Jerusalem is God’s home, the place of His immediate presence.

Only one man - the High Priest - could enter the Most Holy Place, and then only on one day each year. But in the new creation, all God’s people will live in God’s Most Holy Place, in His immediate presence, for all eternity. This is what the New Jerusalem pictures, something we’ll look at more closely in our final session (Session 16).

The cherubim

These mysterious beings protected the tree of life in the Garden of Eden after Adam’s fall (Genesis 3.24). Now we meet them again in the Tabernacle. As well as adorning the innermost curtain of the tent and the inner veil, golden cherubim shadowed the mercy seat (Exodus 25.17-22) as if to guard God’s throne. In addition to these, the Most Holy Place in Solomon’s Temple also contained two huge cherubim (1 Kings 6.23-28) with outstretched wings. Again their pose suggests they’re guarding God’s throne.

Who are the cherubim? Ezekiel and John the apostle give us a clue. They saw *“living creatures”* (Ezekiel 1.5-14, Revelation 4.6-8); Ezekiel identifies the creatures he saw as the cherubim (Ezekiel 10.1-22). They were great winged beings with the face of a lion (the greatest of wild animals), an ox (the greatest of domestic animals), an eagle (the greatest of birds) and a human (the greatest of all creatures on Earth).

The cherubim seem to be real creatures - powerful angels who live in God’s presence in heaven. But they (like many things God creates) seem to symbolise something, too. Alec Motyer says they *“represent all creation in its perfection in the presence of God the Creator . . .”* Perhaps we can be more specific. God made mankind to rule creation (Genesis 1.26-28). The cherubim may well symbolise mankind in particular – in fact, Ezekiel describes them as predominantly human in form (see Ezekiel 1.5, 8, 10).

The cherubim’s role in the Garden of Eden tallies with their position in the Tabernacle and the Temple. It seems they were **guardians** of God’s sanctuary. That was mankind’s role, too:

► **Adam and Eve** God appointed Adam and Eve to take care of God's first sanctuary, the Garden of Eden (as we saw in Session 3).

► **The Old Testament priests** At Sinai, God appointed people to look after His sanctuary in the wilderness – the priests. Priests continued that role in Solomon's Temple, that replaced the Tabernacle.

► **The church** Now, in the New Testament age, our bodies (1 Corinthians 6.19-20) and God's people corporately (1 Corinthians 3.16-17, 2 Corinthians 6.16-18) - are also God's sanctuaries. God lives in them. So we, too, must act as guardians, keeping ourselves individually and corporately holy and fit for God to dwell in.

So here's a definite link between us humans and the cherubim. The cherubim are doing what God has appointed mankind to do – keeping watch over God's sanctuary on Earth. This suggests that – first and foremost – the cherubim symbolise *God's people serving and worshipping Him in His earthly home*. They show us the glorious calling to which God has destined His people for all eternity.

A new creation

God is holy. So how could He come to live here in a world contaminated with sin? His solution was the Tabernacle. It was a spotlessly holy sanctuary in the midst of a fallen world - in Peter Enns' words "a piece of holy ground amid a world that has lost its way".

Viewed from outside, all you would see would be the dark outermost covering of leather - dull and ordinary. But stepping inside was like stepping into a different world. That was the whole point. It *was* a different world - a place, untainted by sin, where God lived and ruled, a meticulously crafted world of holiness and peace and beauty and fragrance.

The aroma of the incense and the beauty of the curtains decorated with cherubim in blue, purple and scarlet, illuminated by the flickering light of the lampstand and reflected in the gold and silver of the furniture and framework, would have been stunning, breathtaking.

This desert tent was no less than a new creation – a glimpse and foreshadowing of the glorious new creation to be unveiled at the end of the Bible. In fact, scholars have noticed parallels between the creation narrative in Genesis 1.1-2.3 and the account of the Tabernacle's creation. Three key parallels are these:

Parallel 1

God tells Moses how to build the Tabernacle. He does this in seven speeches (each introduced by "the LORD said to Moses" (Exodus 25.1-30.10; 30.11-16; 30.17-21; 30.22-33; 30.34-38; 31.1-11 and 31.12-17). In the seventh God commands His people to keep the Sabbath. This sevenfold pattern ending in the Sabbath echoes the sevenfold creation account - the seven creation days.

Parallel 2

The Spirit of God hovered over the dark lifeless Earth, ready to transform it into a beautiful world that God planned to make His home with us (Genesis 1.2). The Spirit of God filled Bezalel to enable him to construct God's beautiful wilderness home among His people Israel

(Exodus 31.3, 35.31).

Parallel 3

Finally, J. Richard Middleton points out that Bezalel, the overseer of the Tabernacle's construction, is filled with God's Spirit Who gives him "*wisdom*", "*understanding*", and "*knowledge*" (Exodus 31.3 NKJV). God created the world by "*wisdom*", "*understanding*" and "*knowledge*" (Proverbs 3.19-20). The original Hebrew words for these three terms in both places are identical. God uses precisely the same words to describe how He created Earth, and how He inspired Bezalel to construct His new creation – the Tabernacle.

Another Eden

Because it was God's home, the Tabernacle reflected God's original home - the Garden of Eden. The Tabernacle was a new Garden of Eden where mankind would once again have access to God's immediate presence. As Sandra Richter explains, "*In the tabernacle the Presence [of God] lives on earth for the first time since Eden*".

► Adam was to "*to work . . . and take care of*" the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2.15, NIV). The only other passages in the first five books of the Bible where these two verbs are used together (Numbers 3.7-8, 8.26, 18.5-6) are those that speak about guarding the Tabernacle and serving God in it.

► God expelled mankind from the Garden of Eden eastwards (as Genesis 3.24 suggests). People entered the Tabernacle *from* the east, as if retracing their steps and entering God's presence again. God is allowing people to return to His home (as far as possible in those days before Jesus came).

► The way to the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden was protected by cherubim (Genesis 3.24). God's home was also symbolically protected by cherubim. The Tabernacle's inner tent was decorated with them (Exodus 26.1) and two cherubim watched over the Mercy Seat in the Most Holy Place (see Exodus 25.17-22).

► In the garden was the Tree of Life. There was a symbolic 'tree of life' in the Tabernacle, too. The candlestick in the Holy Place was like a tree with its branches and "*cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms*" (Exodus 25.33, NIV).



Image courtesy of www.HolyLandPhotos.org
A model of the candlestick (or 'menorah') which was in the Holy Place.



'Moses' Tabernacle in the Wilderness' painted by Norbert McNulty (1938-2009). A striking image of what the Tabernacle would have looked like at night, with the nation of Israel encamped around it. The pillar of fire, the visible manifestation of God by night, rests above the Most Holy Place. Although the artist has depicted the tents as more European than Middle Eastern, this painting is a realistic and vivid portrayal of what we would have seen if we had been there among God's people.

Image © Mark & Jody McNulty (www.selahart.com)

The camp of Israel

Around the Tabernacle were pitched the tents of Israel (Numbers 1.52-53). Moses and Aaron and his sons pitched on the eastern side in front of the Tabernacle's entrance, guarding the doorway (Numbers 3.38). The Levites pitched on the other three sides (Numbers 3.23,29,35). Beyond them ranged the tents of the other twelve tribes, forming a great square (Numbers 2.1-34). The Tabernacle was in the centre of the camp; God dwelt right in the midst of His people Israel.

Foot Note God in the centre of life

God lived in the middle of the camp - in the midst of the commotion and noise of daily life there!

God is in the midst of our daily lives, too. We don't have to escape our circumstances; we can enjoy the peace of His presence in the midst of the busyness and turmoil of our ordinary lives.

God's home on earth

God is everywhere (see Psalm 139.7-10). But here in the Tabernacle, God made His home in a special way. In fact, the word Tabernacle often translates the Hebrew word *mishkān*, which means in general 'a place to dwell'.

The tent of meeting

God often called His Tabernacle "*the tent of meeting*" (for example Exodus 27.21, 30.16, 31.7). He said to Moses: "*There I will meet you and speak to you; there also I will meet with*

the Israelites . . ." (Exodus 29.42-43, NIV). God - as far as possible under that covenant - welcomed people into His home. Only selected representatives could enter, and they had to be thoroughly prepared and offer the appropriate sacrifices. But they *could* come. Once a year Aaron was even able to enter the Most Holy Place, the very presence-chamber of God (Leviticus 16.11-15, see Hebrews 9.7).

Foot Note From Eden to the New Creation

God has always wanted to live with people on Earth:

► The Garden of Eden was God's first home. There wasn't any Temple or Tabernacle there, because there was no sin that made this necessary. The *whole* garden was filled with His presence.

► But after sin spoiled this world, God set about creating a sanctuary where He, the Holy God, could live here in this soiled world. The Tabernacle was the first; centuries later Solomon built a Temple that replaced it, which was rebuilt after the exile. When Jesus came to Earth, He became the new Temple on Earth (see John 2.19-21); He "*tabernacled*" or "*lived in a tent*" (John 1.14, literal translation) here. When the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost, God's people became "*a holy temple in the Lord*" (Ephesians 2.19-22).

► Finally, in God's spotless new creation, God will have no need for a special sanctuary. There'll be no sin in creation to make that necessary - just like the Garden of Eden before the Fall. So there'll be no Temple, because "*its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb*" (Revelation 21.22) and God's glory will fill the whole of creation (see Isaiah 11.9, Habakkuk 2.14).

The way into God's presence

The Tabernacle was God's house; His presence filled its innermost room, the Most Holy Place. The *arrangement* of the Tabernacle and its furniture show us how to enter His presence and have fellowship with Him there.

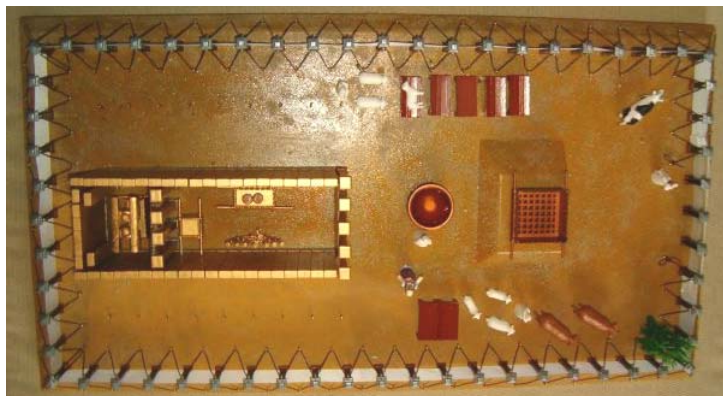


Image © Petri Paavola

The picture above shows how the Tabernacle and its furniture were arranged. It's of a Tabernacle model, viewed from above, and with the coverings of the tent itself removed so you can see the furniture inside. Note the altar and basin in the centre of the courtyard, and the tent to the left of the courtyard. The tent is divided into the larger Holy Place (containing the lampstand, the table of showbread and the altar of incense) and smaller Most Holy Place to its left (containing the Ark of the Covenant).

To go into the Most Holy Place where God lived, you would first pass the bronze **altar of burnt offering**. Then you would pass the **basin** where the priests washed. Pushing past a curtain, you would enter the Holy Place. Passing the **lampstand** on your left and the **table of showbread** on the right, you would go past the **altar of incense**, and push through the veil into the Most Holy Place, where the **Ark of**

the **Covenant** was.

The High Priest could go this way into the Most Holy Place on only one day each year, and under the strictest conditions. But Jesus's perfect sacrifice has opened up the way into the heavenly Most Holy Place for us (see Hebrews 6.19-20). The Tabernacle shows us how.

► First, we enter the **courtyard** – that is, we show our repentance and intent to get right with God. ① We first pass the **altar** where the sacrifices were offered - we accept the benefit of Jesus's sacrifice for us. ② Then we are washed in the **basin**, picturing new birth, the "*washing of regeneration*" (Titus 3.5).

► Now cleansed and born from above, we enter the **Holy Place** and experience all the blessings of our new life with God. ① The tree-like **lampstand** reminds us of the Tree of Life. Just as sunlight brings natural life, so this Tree's light brings spiritual life. Jesus is our Tree of Life, our source of spiritual life. We walk in His life-giving light (compare John 1.4, 8.12, 1 John 1.5-7). Symbolically, we 'eat' from Jesus, the Tree of Life, and so enjoy the abundant eternal life that Jesus provides (see Revelation 2.7, and compare Genesis 3.22, Revelation 22.2). ② We enjoy a meal on the **table of showbread** – the meal picturing that we're part of God's family circle and enjoying table fellowship with Him in His home. ③ The **golden altar** in front of the veil seems to picture our true spiritual worship (see John 4.23) - our adoration, praise and prayer being symbolised by **incense** rising up from this altar (compare Psalm 141.2, Revelation 5.8 and 8.3-4).

► And through the veil we enter the **Most Holy Place**, the very presence-chamber of God. Those who have been born of the Spirit may go boldly through the veil into God's immediate presence (Hebrews 10.19-22).

God's guardians and servants

Whenever God makes a home in His creation, He appoints created beings to care for it, and to worship and serve Him there. That seems to have been Satan's original role in God's home in the heavenly places. That was Adam and Eve's task in God's garden in Eden. Now God appointed people to do this in His new home in the wilderness, the Tabernacle. Those people were the **priests**, assisted by the **Levites**.

He chose Aaron, the High Priest, and his sons to keep the Tabernacle pure and holy. They were to worship and serve Him there, and offer sacrifices for the people. The priests were also to teach the Law and help the people to understand it (see Deuteronomy 33.10, Malachi 2.7). They also acted as judges (Deuteronomy 17.8-12; 21.5; Ezekiel 44.24), and dealt with cases of leprous diseases (Leviticus 13.1-14.57, Deuteronomy 24.8).

In these ways the priests mediated between God and His people. They brought God's rule and blessing to the whole nation; in turn, they worshipped and served God on behalf of the people. God commissioned the other men of the tribe of Levi to help them (see Numbers 3.5-37, 4.1-49, 8.5-26). But the whole nation was called to be priests, too – they were "*a kingdom of priests*" (Exodus 19.6). They were God's new humanity. They were *all* to worship and serve Him in all that they thought and said and did.

To worship and serve God

God called Aaron and his sons, first and foremost, to stand in His presence and serve Him there (see Exodus 28.1, Ezekiel 44.15-16). They spent a lot of time and effort offering various sacrifices for themselves and the people (which we'll look at in more detail later).

But there were two key ceremonies that formed the core of their ministry.

► Every morning and evening, they were to burn incense on the golden altar in the Holy Place (Exodus 30.7-8, Deuteronomy 33.10). The Bible associates incense with prayer (see Psalm 141.2, Revelation 5.8 and 8.3-4); the sweet-smelling incense rising to God seems to represent prayers of adoration, praise, thanksgiving and intercession.

► They sacrificed daily burnt offerings with their cereal and drink offerings on the bronze altar in the courtyard (Exodus 29.38-42). These sacrifices symbolised the perpetual consecration of the nation to God.

These two offerings formed a ceaseless background to everything else that the priests did (Deuteronomy 33.10).

To guard God's home

The priests and Levites were also guardians of God's home



Image © George Bates at www.thebiblezone.com

Replica of the High Priest's robes. Under the outer, multicoloured ephod (rather like a kind of apron) is the blue robe, and under that, the white tunic. Over the ephod is the breastpiece with its jewels (depicted close-up on the next page). His turban bears a gold plate inscribed with 'Holy to the LORD'.

(Numbers 3.7-8, 8.26, 18.3-5). Remember how God commanded Adam to *"keep"* (ESV) or *"take care of"* (NIV) the garden (Genesis 2.15). This word is also used of the priests and Levites guarding the Tabernacle from defilement (see Numbers 18.3-5). Nothing unclean could violate God's Tabernacle home. No-one could just barge in to meet God. The priests had to ensure that they themselves, and the people, approached God in the right way, in a state of purity, and with the appropriate sacrifices.

Robed in beauty and glory

God gave Aaron and his sons special clothes to wear (Exodus 28.2-43, 39.1-31; see the picture above). Working from inner to outer garments, Aaron wore a linen undergarment, a linen tunic, and a blue robe. Over these clothes he wore an ephod (a kind of apron) of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet yarns, and linen.

The ephod matched the colours of the inner Tabernacle tent. The ephod had a breastpiece, with the same colour scheme, attached to its front. On the breastpiece were 12 gems, each engraved with the name of a tribe of Israel. Inside the breastpiece were the mysterious Urim and Thummim, *"the means of making decisions"* (Exodus 28.30 NIV). Aaron bore two further gems, each engraved with the names of six tribes, on his shoulders.

Aaron wore a sash around his waist, and a turban on his head, which bore, on its front, a gold plate engraved with *'Holy to the LORD'* (Exodus 28.36). His headdress declared that he was consecrated to God.

Aaron's sons also had special clothes, though not as elaborate.

The High Priest mediated between God and His people. He carried the names of Israel's 12 tribes on the gems worn over his heart and on his shoulders. He, so to speak, carried the nation on his shoulders, and held them in his heart. By His priestly ministration, he secured the way by which the whole nation could enter God's presence and worship and serve Him. As Douglas Stuart explains, *"whatever [the high priest] did, he did as the people's representative, and his actions would have the same essential effect they would have if all of [the people], one by one, had done the same thing. The high priest symbolized all Israel."*

Aaron and his sons were washed, robed, anointed with a special anointing oil, anointed and sprinkled with blood to consecrate them as priests. Special sacrifices were also offered. Exodus 29.1-35 explains what was done.

There seems to be multiple symbolism here.

► Aaron pictures our Great High Priest, Jesus

In his role as high priest, Aaron prefigures our great High Priest Jesus (see especially Hebrews 8.1-2, 9.11-12).

► The priests picture mankind as God intended us to be

Notice how God specifically instructs the priests to wear linen undergarments *"to cover their naked flesh"* (Exodus 28.42-43). We're reminded here of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Before they sinned, they were naked without shame. But afterwards they felt exposed and ashamed (see Genesis 3.7, and compare Revelation 3.18, 16.15) and needed to be clothed (see Genesis 3.7,21). God specifically commands the priests' *"naked flesh"* to be covered. In so doing, God is symbolically reversing the Fall.

But God does much more than just cover their nakedness. He designs magnificent robes for Aaron *"for glory and for beauty"* (Exodus 28.2) – you can see what they looked like in the picture on this page. His sons, too, were clothed with robes *"for glory and beauty"* (Exodus 28.40). God made mankind in His image (Genesis 1.26-27), to reflect His glory. God invests the priests with beauty and glory. God is, so to speak, investing the priests with the glory He made mankind to have. Again, God is – symbolically - reversing the Fall.

► Aaron foreshadows God living in human hearts

Thirdly, it's striking how similar the High Priest's outermost robe was to the Tabernacle itself. His ephod (a kind of apron), its band and breastpiece were of gold, blue,



Image © George Bates at www.thebiblezone.com

Replica of breastpiece that the High Priest wore on his chest. On the breastpiece are 12 gems, each engraved with the name of a tribe of Israel. The breastpiece was like a pocket, and inside were the mysterious Urim and Thummim.

purple, and scarlet yarns, and linen (Exodus 28.6-8,15) - very similar to the colours of the inner Tabernacle tent and its veils (Exodus 26.1,31,36). In Vern Poythress's words, "the high priest is a kind of mini-tabernacle".

The Tabernacle was God's home; the clothing of the high priests pictures this man as God's home, too. He seems to be foreshadowing a time when God's people - and each individual believer - would be indwelt by God Himself (see John 14.23, 1 Corinthians 3.16-17, 6.19, 2 Corinthians 6.16).

A life of sacrifice

The priests not only offered sacrifices, they lived sacrificial lives, serving God and His people in the Tabernacle. For example, the High Priest, Aaron, couldn't even take part in the burial of his own mother and father (Leviticus 21.10-11).

God didn't give the priests and the other Levites an inheritance in the Promised Land, like all the other tribes (Numbers 18.20, Deuteronomy 10.9). God *Himself* was their inheritance. He gave them 48 towns in the Promised Land to live in (Numbers 35.1-8 and see Joshua 21.1-42), with some land around them to pasture their herds.

The priests received a number of dues - Numbers 18.8-20,26-29 is the key passage detailing these. They included parts of the cereal, purification, reparation and fellowship offerings, the firstfruits of the harvest, and firstborn animals (or a cash payment or substitute animal instead), and the redemption money for firstborn male babies.

The bulk of the tithes that the people had to give (a tenth of their crops, herds and flocks) went to the Levites. In turn, the Levites had to give a tenth of what they were given to the priests (Numbers 18.21-32).

The Law - God's guidance for blessing

God gave His people His Law. Large parts of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are devoted to it. The foundation is the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20.1-17, Deuteronomy 5.1-22). They begin: "*I am the LORD your God, . . . You shall have no other gods before me.*" - a commandment reflected in Deuteronomy 6.5: "*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*" Here God goes to the root of sin - every sin ultimately disobeys this command.

As well as moral and civil laws, the Law details the sacrificial system and the calendar of special days, festivals and seasons, and sets a pattern for the nation's leaders - priests, prophets, judges and kings. Woven through everything, God reveals His own character - His love and holiness. No other nation on Earth had such a righteous body of legislation (Deuteronomy 4.8).

God didn't want slavish and grudging obedience to the Law. Israel was to obey God's Law with all their heart and soul (Deuteronomy 26.16). The Law was to be lodged in their hearts (Deuteronomy 6.6, 11.18).

The Law covered more than just outward acts - it forbade covetousness as well as theft (Exodus 20.17), and hate as well as murder (Leviticus 19.17).

Why did God give the Law?

To show His people how to live

The Law wasn't, to quote Elmer Martens, "a set of arbitrary restrictions intended to inhibit people and make them miserable and guilty"; it was to enable them to enjoy life to the full. The word 'law' is rather an unfortunate translation. The Hebrew word is *torah*, meaning 'instruction' or 'guidance'.

Through the Law, God was teaching His people how to live. In N.T. Wright's words, the Torah "holds out an extraordinary blueprint of what a genuinely human life is like". God was restoring mankind. He was reversing the Fall - as far as possible in mankind's fallen condition.

Tremendous blessing would overtake them if they obeyed (Leviticus 26.3-12, Deuteronomy 28.1-14). The psalmist loved God's Law (Psalm 119.97). It was more precious than gold and sweeter than honey to him (Psalm 19.7-11).

To the Jewish rabbis, studying the Torah was the highest form of worship. And that study began early. In later times, as Gordon Wenham reports, "Leviticus used to be the first book that Jewish children studied in the synagogue."



Image © Florian Prischl / Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 3.0)
A path up to the summit of the mountain traditionally thought to be Mount Sinai. It shows the kind of route that Moses would have taken to go up the mountain to God.

And the Law wasn't a way to earn God's salvation. God's people were already saved; He had rescued them from bondage in Egypt and brought them to Himself (Exodus 19.4, 20.2). Now God was teaching Israel how to live as His people. As Michael Williams puts it, "God calls Israel to keep the law, not in order to become God's people but because they already are God's people (Exodus 19.4, 20.1-2). Salvation was then (as it is now) by God's grace through faith, and not by works. In Dr. Williams' words, "The law was never intended to be a means of earning salvation. Rather, God gave it to guide Israel in living in a way that would please their Redeemer."

To reveal God's character

God's Law revealed what God was like (compare Deuteronomy 10.17-18). The righteousness recorded in the Law revealed the righteousness of the One Who gave the Law. Its pages reveal His holiness, His goodness, His moral integrity. It displays His graciousness and mercy, His justice, His love. And so when Israel obeyed the Law, they would reflect God's character to the nations around. They would reveal what God is like. In other words, they would be God's image-bearers.

God created mankind in His image (Genesis 1.26-27). Israel was God's new mankind. To the extent that Israel obeyed God's law, to that extent they would fulfil God's original purpose for mankind - to bear His image and manifest His character in flesh and blood here on Earth.

To teach about holiness

God said "... *be holy, for I am holy*" (Leviticus 11.44-45). God said to Aaron: "*You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean*" (Leviticus 10.10).

The Law makes a distinction about the **status** of a person, place or thing – they may be "*holy*" (sacred, consecrated to God) or "*common*" (for use in the normal, daily, course of life). For example, the priests, and the Tabernacle, were consecrated to God, and holy.

The Law also distinguished the **condition** of a person, thing or place – they may be "*clean*" or "*unclean*". For example, people could be defiled (made unclean) by such things as touching a corpse, bodily emissions, or skin diseases (Numbers 5.1-4, Leviticus 12.1-8; 13.1-46; 14.1-32; 15.1-33, Numbers 19.1-22). Mould or mildew in houses and on

clothes (Leviticus 13.47-59; 14.33-53) also required purification. What could and couldn't be eaten was catalogued (Leviticus 11.1-47, Deuteronomy 14.1-21).

Some of these laws (such as the ban on eating pork) clearly had a hygienic basis. But many seem rather inexplicable to us. The reason for all these laws was this - the holy God lived with them. Remember how Mount Sinai quaked and smoked and burnt as God descended on it - and now He lived in the very midst of them! The Tabernacle was holy, the whole nation belonged to God. God was teaching His people something vital. The nation had to keep God's sanctuary, the camp, and their bodies in a state fit for God to live amongst them.

To reveal and suppress sin

The Law makes it quite plain what is sin, and what isn't (see Romans 7.7). It was another way that God restrained sin - we saw others in Session 5. Sin is a violation of our own human nature. Every sin a person commits imprints itself on their inner being, and defiles them. It impacts on other people, too. By exposing and restraining sin through the Law, God - in His mercy - hindered this damaging defilement.



Foot Note The curse of the Law

The Bible speaks about "*the curse of the law*" (Galatians 3.13). But the Law was not a curse in itself. It was a blessing of the highest order. The problem lay with mankind. The law was "*weakened by the flesh*" (Romans 8.3). People, in their fallen state, couldn't keep the law. So their disobedience called down the Law's curse.

What was the curse? It was the curse of living without God's blessing and under His righteous judgment – a blighted existence graphically portrayed in Deuteronomy 27.9-26, 28.15-68.

To restore relationships broken at the Fall

At the Fall, all mankind's relationships were shattered - as we saw in Session 4. The Law showed how these relationships - with God, with people, with animals and the environment – were to be restored. And it showed how to sever wrong relationships - with evil people, and with evil spiritual powers.

With God

God's people were to love Him with all their heart, soul and strength (see Deuteronomy 6.5, Luke 10.27). That love was to be shown in obedience to His commandments.

The sacrificial system dealt with the sin barrier between God and His people (as far as this was possible under that covenant); it enabled God to continue to live among them and remain in fellowship with them.

One of these sacrifices, the fellowship offering (which we'll look at below) was a special time of fellowship with God. The worshipper and others invited to the feast ate parts of the sacrifice. As we've already seen, to eat a meal together in God's presence was an act of committed fellowship. Those who ate this sacrifice were enjoying fellowship with God as well as one another.

The holy days and festivals, too, were special opportunities for His people to worship God – as we'll see later in this session.

With other people

The Law taught people how to behave toward each other. The undergirding principle was this: *“you shall love your neighbour as yourself”* (Leviticus 19.18, Matthew 22.39, Mark 12.31, Luke 10.27, and compare Leviticus 19.34).

The Law regulated every realm of human conflict and coexistence, from murder (for example, Exodus 20.13), through to simple righteousness, such as honesty in weights and measures (for example Leviticus 19.35-36).

God’s people were to care for the poor and disadvantaged (for example Exodus 22.22-27, Leviticus 19.14), and for people from other nations who lived among them (Deuteronomy 10.18-19, Leviticus 19.33-34).

The cornerstone and mainstay of society was the family; a foundational law therefore commanded respect for parents (see Exodus 20.12, 21.15,17).

With creation

The Law required people to care for their animals - oxen weren’t be muzzled when threshing corn (Deuteronomy 25.4) and livestock, as well as people, were to rest on the Sabbath (Exodus 20.10, Deuteronomy 5.14).

To prepare His people to meet Jesus

Like the rest of the Old Testament, the Law prepared God’s people for Jesus’s coming (see Luke 24.27). Allen Ross

says, “. . . when Christ came God did not have to teach people what atonement was, for they had been taught this for 1400 years in the Law and the drama of the ritual.”

In these different ways, the Law restored relationships broken at the Fall – as far as this was possible during those centuries before God’s Spirit was poured out at Pentecost.

The giving of the Law was a key step towards restoring mankind’s original blessing in Paradise.



Image © Sagie Maoz from Ashdod, Israel / Wikipedia (CC BY-SA 2.0)
Reading from a Hebrew scroll of the Torah (Law).

The sacrifices

To our modern eyes, the Old Testament sacrifices seem complicated and obscure. We enter a gory world of blood and butchery and burning carcasses that seems repugnant to us. But sacrifices lie at the centre of the covenant God gave through Moses. God lived among His sinful people, and the sacrifices enabled them to have fellowship with Him - as far as was possible under that covenant.

The five key sacrifices

The first seven chapters of Leviticus detail the five basic types of sacrifice.

Four are animal sacrifices. The worshipper brought the animal to the Tabernacle, and laid his hands on its head (thus identifying the animal as a substitute for the offerer – the animal’s death was a substitute for the offerer’s own death). Then the worshipper killed it (in such a way as to allow the blood to flow out), skinned it and chopped it up. The blood was handled in different ways, and at least part of the animal was burnt on the altar.

The blood is very significant. As we noted earlier in this session, blood carries life-giving oxygen and nutrients to every part of a body; as the Bible puts it *“the life of a creature is in the blood”* (Leviticus 17.11, NIV). Blood represents life. And when blood is shed, it represents life being poured out and brought to an end in death. The blood symbolised the death of the animal. And the animal was a substitute for the one who brought it for sacrifice; it died instead of the offerer.

The burnt offering

This was the first of the five basic types of sacrifice to be

described, and the most frequent (it’s described in Leviticus 1.3-17; 6.8-13; 7.8) – suggesting it was the most important of the sacrifices.

Unlike other sacrifices, the whole animal was burnt (apart from its skin and crop); nothing was left for anyone to eat.

The burnt offering was a tangible and evocative act of worship. It symbolised the worshipper’s total consecration to God and that God completely accepted the worshipper. Any barrier that existed between God and the worshipper was removed. As Allen Ross explains, “. . . *there was full atonement. The sweet aroma of this offering would ascend to the heavens, signifying that God was accepting it and the worshipper with pleasure*”.

At heart, all sin is rebellion against God. Adam seized control of his life and began to live independently of God. The burnt offering reverses that rebellion. In this sacrifice the offerer devoted himself to God, to Whom he rightfully belonged. It expressed his desire to love God with all his heart, soul and strength, and obey Him.

The cereal offering

This was an offering of cereals in various forms - flour, unleavened loaves or wafers, or grain, almost always with other ingredients, such as oil. It’s described in Leviticus 2.1-16, 6.14-23, 7.9-14; Numbers 5.11-15,18,25-26, 15.1-16.

The cereal offering was usually offered as a supplement to a burnt or fellowship offering. At harvest-time, a special cereal offering was offered – the firstfruits of the harvest (Leviticus 2.14-16).

In the burnt offering, the worshipper surrendered *himself*



'Agnus Dei' ('Lamb of God') painted by Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664) (Museo del Prado, Madrid). A wonderful depiction of a lamb ready to be sacrificed, and representing Jesus as the Lamb of God. The artist painted a number of versions; another has a Latin paraphrase of Acts 8.32 at the bottom of the painting: in the ESV this passage reads "Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: 'Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth.'"

wholly to God. In the cereal offering he gave back to God a token of his *goods* – the fruits of his labours, his wealth and his possessions, all of which God had provided for him.

The purification offering (sin offering)

The sin or purification offering is described in Leviticus 4.1-5.13; 6.24-30; see also Numbers 15.22-31. Its key meaning is purification from sin's defilement. An animal was sacrificed (but the poor could offer flour instead). A purification offering was made for some sins of negligence and those committed accidentally. It was also offered for some ritual impurities.

The purification offering was unique in what was done with the blood. For the most important classes of this offering, blood was brought right into the Holy Place and sprinkled before God in front of the veil, and smeared on the horns of the altar of incense. On the Day of Atonement the blood of a sin offering was brought right into the Most Holy Place.

Sin pollutes. It defiles people, and it defiled God's sanctuary. The penalty for sin is death. But to cleanse away sin's pollution, God accepted the sacrificial animal's death instead. But why is there such an emphasis on what was done with the blood in this type of sacrifice?

We mustn't think of the blood *in itself* as a kind of 'spiritual disinfectant'. Rather, the act of applying the blood to the sanctuary (for example, smearing it on the horns of the bronze altar in the courtyard) was *symbolic*:

- God graciously accepted the animal sacrifice (instead of the worshipper's death) as *sufficient to wipe away sin's pollution*. He reckoned the animal's death to be full payment for sin's pollution.
- The application of the blood symbolically applied the

benefit of the animal's death to God's home and to the sinner. That is, *that God accepted the animal's death instead of the sinner's death, and so they were cleansed from sin's pollution*. And so God could forgive the sinner (see, for example, Leviticus 4.26).

The standard purification offering described here didn't cover all sins. So on the Day of Atonement a special purification offering that covered all sins was made for the whole nation (described in Leviticus 16.1-34). We look at this below.

There was a close association between purification offerings and burnt offerings; when offered together, the purification offering was made first. The pollution of sin had to be dealt with before the worshipper could dedicate himself to the Lord (symbolised by the burnt offering).

The reparation offering

The reparation (or 'guilt' or 'trespass') offering (Leviticus 5.14-6.7; 7.1-7) focuses especially on *compensation*. This sacrifice was required, for example, when someone sinned "*unintentionally in regard to any of the LORD's holy things*" (NIV) or deceived his neighbour "*about something entrusted to them or left in their care or about something stolen*" (NIV).

Where appropriate, a further payment was made as a kind of 'damages' in addition to the actual animal itself. And any misappropriated goods had to be restored to their rightful owner.

The fellowship offering

The fellowship (or peace) offering was voluntary. It's described in Leviticus 3.1-17, 7.11-36, 19.5-8, 22.21-24,29-

30. Three specific categories are listed – those offered as a thank-offering to God, those offered in connection with a vow, and “freewill” offerings that someone could offer so that he and his family could celebrate a feast before God.

Some parts of the fellowship offering were offered to God and some of the animal was eaten by the priests. But the worshipper and others invited to the feast also ate of it – that makes this sacrifice unique. As we’ve already seen, to eat a meal together in God’s presence was an act of committed fellowship. Those who ate this sacrifice were enjoying fellowship with God and with one another. It reminds us of the feast God laid before the leaders of Israel on Mount Sinai. And it’s one of the Old Testament pointers to the Lord’s Supper.

The path to fellowship

These five sacrifices pictured how sin must be dealt with and how fellowship with God and other people can be restored:

sacrifice	meaning
sin offering	pollution caused by sin is dealt with by death
reparation offering	restitution is made for sinful acts
burnt offering	the worshipper offers himself wholly to God
cereal offering	the worshipper gives all that he possesses to God
fellowship offering	the worshipper and everyone who eats the offering with him enjoy fellowship with God and each other



Image © BiblePlaces.com at www.BiblePlaces.com
Full-scale replica of the altar of burnt offering in the Tabernacle model, Timna Park, Israel.

The daily offerings

Sacrifices and cereal and drink offerings were also offered for the whole nation each day, each Sabbath, and (accompanied by a sin offering) on the first day of each month. They’re described in Exodus 29.38-42 and Numbers 28.3-15.

Purification rites of the red heifer and the birds

There were two other purification rites that involved a sacrificial animal:

► **The red heifer** Numbers 19.1-22 describes how a red heifer was sacrificed, and its carcass burnt; cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet yarn was added as it burnt. The resultant ashes were mixed with water to purify anyone who had contact with the dead, or with a grave. Hebrews 9.13 refers to this rite.

► **The leper’s cleansing** Leprosy in the Bible covered several skin diseases, including what we know as leprosy. A leper who was pronounced free from his disease underwent cleansing rituals (Leviticus 14.1-32). The first one involved fresh water, two birds (one of which was sacrificed, the other released) and (like the ritual of the red heifer) cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet yarn. This ritual was also used in the cleansing ceremony for a house that had been pronounced free from mould.



Image courtesy of www.HolyLandPhotos.org
Replica of the altar of burnt offering (this is not from the reconstruction in Timna Park, but it’s very similar to the altar there, shown opposite).

Passover and the Day of Atonement

There were two very special days in the Hebrew calendar. **The Passover** was celebrated at the beginning of the sacred cycle of festivals; **the Day of Atonement** took place towards the end.

Passover

We’ve already seen the very first Passover (see Exodus 12.1-14,21-28), which occurred just before Israel’s deliverance from bondage in Egypt. Each succeeding year, God’s people would kill a lamb and eat a Passover meal to celebrate their deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 12.14,24-27,43-49, Leviticus 23.5, Numbers 9.9-14, 28.16, Deuteronomy 16.1-3,4-7). And the Passover points forward to the Lord’s Supper, which Jesus instituted at Passover time.

The first Passover was a unique sacrifice. It was an atoning sacrifice; the firstborn were saved from death by the sacrifice of the lamb. Using a sprig of hyssop, the blood of the sacrificial animal was daubed on the doorposts and lintel of the house in which the sacrifice was eaten (Exodus 12.7,22). The blood was presented to God as a visible token of the life laid down in sacrifice. The sacrificial animal formed the main course of a meal, too.

This first Passover took place before the Levitical sacrifices were ordained, and appears to be a forerunner of this sacrificial system. As such, it seems to combine the two key Levitical sacrifices, the **purification offering** (because of the emphasis on the blood) and the **fellowship offering**

(because the offerers ate it). It also echoes the **burnt offering**.



The small Samaritan community in the Holy Land still sacrifice lambs at Passover. This is an early photograph showing them preparing the lamb's carcass.

The fellowship offering

At its heart, the Passover was a meal. We've seen that the peace offering was a meal, too. In fact, Gordon Wenham says that "the Passover could be described as a specialized type of peace offering that was celebrated once a year by the whole nation."

As we've seen, sharing a meal was a sign of a committed covenant relationship. God's people ate the Passover lamb in His presence. It was an act of commitment between God and His people and marked a new step in their covenant relationship. Those who ate the Passover meal were now consecrated to God. In turn, God was bound to them by covenant. God had already made this covenant with their forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exodus 2.24, Deuteronomy 7.8). But now God was going to take a new step in fulfilling that covenant. He would rescue them from Egypt, be their Companion, their Protector, their Guide and their Provider in the wilderness, and lead them into the Promised Land.

The purification offering

The special manipulation of the blood reminds us of the purification offering. This offering dealt with the pollution of sin. So the Passover sacrifice also seems to function as a kind of purification offering, cleansing away the sin of the people in the house who ate the lamb. The link with purification is strengthened by the fact that the Bible

associates hyssop with purification (see Psalm 51.7).

The burnt offering

The Passover also echoes another of the five Levitical sacrifices – the burnt offering, because although it wasn't wholly burnt, the *whole animal* had to be "roasted with fire".

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

The annual Passover meal was followed by the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12.15-20, 13.3-10, 23.15, 34.18, Leviticus 23.6-8, Numbers 28.17-25, Deuteronomy 16.3-4,8,16). God's people had to remove leaven from their houses, and eat only unleavened bread for these seven days.

In ancient times, people kept a piece of leavened dough (that is, dough that contained yeast) from one batch of leavened bread to leaven the next batch. But this process could also pass on germs from batch to batch, which would accumulate as time went on. Getting rid of all the old leavened dough broke this chain of contamination. Removing the old leaven and eating unleavened bread symbolised a new beginning. So, as Alec Motyer explains: "The Passover idea of 'leaven', then, is one of decisive newness: the old has passed away and all things have become new." Paul picks up this symbolism in 1 Corinthians 5.6-8 and relates it to the church in Corinth and to us as believers.

Jesus's death fulfilled the whole sacrificial system – as we'll see in Session 13. But there's special significance in the Passover. Jesus is our Passover sacrifice (1 Corinthians 5.7) Who died at the feast of Passover.

The Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement is described in Leviticus 16.1-34 and Numbers 29.7-11. On this day a final great purification offering was offered for all the sins of the nation over the preceding year. This sacrifice consisted of a pair of goats. The two goats together constituted a single purification offering.

The first goat was killed. The High Priest brought its blood (together with that of the bull offered as a sin offering for himself) right into the Most Holy Place (see Hebrews 9.7). This was the only time in the whole year when blood was brought into God's presence. Blood was also sprinkled in the Holy Place (Leviticus 16.16b seems to mean this) and on the altar of burnt offering. These two sacrifices – the bull and the goat – functioned like normal purification offerings. Like them, the sprinkling of the blood symbolically showed that the sinful nation and His Tabernacle home benefitted from the animal's sacrifice – *i.e. that God accepted it as sufficient to cleanse them from sin's defilement*.

The High Priest then placed both hands on the head of the other goat (called the 'scapegoat') and confessed the sins of the entire nation over it. By doing this, he transferred the sins of the entire nation onto the goat. It was then led out eastward into the uninhabited wilderness and released.

What was the significance of this strange ceremony? The first goat died, just as in a normal purification offering. But on this unique occasion in the year, God is going further. He is *showing what the animal's sacrificial death really*



'The Scapegoat' painted in 1854-1856 by William Holman Hunt. The goat is depicted near the southern end of the Dead Sea – a desolate, inhospitable wilderness. Utterly abandoned, the beast stands shakily in the mire, soon to be just another of the skeletons embedded in the mud around it. The goat bears a piece of red cloth. Although not prescribed in Leviticus, the High Priest in Jesus's time tied a piece of scarlet cloth to its horn. This identified it as the scapegoat; and red colour, it seems, represented the sin of the people. The painting's frame bears the quotations 'Surely he hath borne our Grievs, and carried our Sorrows/Vet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of GOD, and afflicted.' (Isaiah LIII, 4) and 'And the Goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a Land not inhabited.' (Leviticus XVI, 22).

was, and what it accomplished. In Arthur Custance's words, the scapegoat "does not suffer *physical death but the death of absolute isolation*". Death is more than just physical death. As we saw in Session 4, death severs relationships. When Adam and Eve sinned, their relationship with God was severed, and their relationship with each other was wrecked. And unless God stepped in to save them, they would spend eternity banished from God's presence and without any meaningful relationships with other people.

That's what the scapegoat symbolically endures. Loaded with the nation's sins, it is banished to the remote, uninhabited wilderness (Leviticus 16.10,22), far from God's presence and far from His people. *The fate of that hapless beast shows what death really is, in a way that God's people could see and understand.*

And the sin-laden goat never returned to the camp – symbolising the complete removal of sins from God's people – "*as far as the east is from the west*" (Psalm 103.12).

So, through God's acceptance of these offerings on this remarkable day, His home and His people were cleansed. He could continue to live among them in the Tabernacle for another year.

The sacrifices and sin

The sacrificial system as a whole covered all sins. It also dealt with ritual impurities that required purification (see, for example, Leviticus 12.1-8 and Luke 2.22-24).

It's clear that God forgave sins even before Jesus's sacrifice (see, for example, Leviticus 4.20 and see also Psalm 85.2,

103.8-12, Isaiah 38.17). And this forgiveness wasn't just a 'legal fiction'. Though yet to be enacted in history, Jesus's sacrifice was already accomplished in the heart of God long before any of these Old Testament sacrifices were made (compare 1 Peter 1.19-20).

Of course, the Law demanded punishment for many sins. For example, murderers were executed (Leviticus 24.17), and the rule of "*eye for eye*" was to be applied (Leviticus 24.19-20). And anyone who committed deliberate and defiant sin and who refused to repent would "*be cut off from among his people*" (Numbers 15.30-31). But even here, the purification offerings of the two goats on the great Day of Atonement dealt with the polluting effect of those sins on God's sanctuary and on the community at large.

People who committed sins for which a sacrifice was prescribed could be forgiven – as long as they offered the sacrifice in a state of repentance and faith. God accepted the sacrifice and forgave them on the basis of Jesus's sacrifice, which alone deals effectively with sin (see Hebrews 10.1-18).

For sins which had no prescribed sacrifice, sinners would have to suffer the punishment prescribed by the Law. Yet if they truly repented and confessed their sin it seems clear that God still forgave them – even though they still had to suffer the legal penalty.

And we have the wonderful example of King David. God forgave him for offences so serious that they demanded the death penalty (2 Samuel 11.1-27, 12.13 and Psalm 51.1-17). David, an adulterer and murderer, found forgiveness when he repented and turned to God. And in his case God did, in fact, avert the penalty of the Law.

The sacrificial system, too, showed God's people:

► **How evil sin really was** The graphic and awesome scene of blood-stained priests ceaselessly offering the sacrifices would have indelibly imprinted the horror of sin on their minds. The fact that this system is now superseded should not blunt our awareness of the gravity of sin.

► **What God needed to do to deal with sin** The sacrificial system demanded huge numbers of animals for slaughter; an entire tribe was dedicated to supervising the sacrificial system. It showed the enormous lengths that God needed to go to in order to deal with sin.

► **How mankind could approach God** As we've already seen, the sacrificial system demonstrated the way of salvation. It pointed forward to Jesus. The High Priest could come into God's presence in the Most Holy Place only once a year, and under the strictest conditions. Now Jesus's perfect sacrifice has opened up the way into God's presence. Those who have been born of the Spirit may go boldly through the veil of the Most Holy Place into God's presence (Hebrews 10.19-22).

Firstfruits



Image courtesy of www.HolyLandPhotos.org
View of a harvested wheat field in the Hill Country of Manasseh – note the individual bundles of wheat as well as the stacks of bundles waiting to be processed; also note the sheep feeding on the stubble.

If they were obedient, God promised His people that they, their livestock and their land would be fruitful (see Deuteronomy 28.1-6). The “*firstfruits*” of this abundance was to be given back to God – that is, to support the priests and Levites, and a small portion would have been used to maintain the Tabernacle and its utensils, and such things as the incense, the oil for the light, and the showbread, etc.

The firstborn boy

The firstborn were to be consecrated to God (Exodus 13.1-2,11-16, 22.29, 34.19-20, Num 18.15-16) as a token of the whole nation's dedication to God. He had redeemed them from slavery; now they belonged to Him (see Isaiah 43.1).

Initially, all the nation's firstborn (of any age) were consecrated. Soon after the Exodus, the tribe of Levi was consecrated to serve God instead of the firstborn (Numbers 3.11-13,40-51).

From that time on, when a firstborn male was born, five shekels were paid to the sanctuary (Numbers 18.16). Firstborn cattle, sheep or goats were consecrated by being sacrificed. But for firstborn humans, this money was paid instead.

The firstborn of the livestock

The firstborn males of the livestock were to be given to God (Exodus 13.1-2,11-16, 22.30, 34.19-20, Leviticus 27.26-27, Numbers 18.15,17-18, Deuteronomy 15.19-23), either offered as a sacrifice, if suitable for that, or redeemed – that is, something else was sacrificed or money was given to the sanctuary instead.

The firstfruits of the crops

The firstfruits of the agricultural produce was to be given to God (Exodus 23.19, 34.26, Leviticus 2.11-12,14-16, Numbers 15.17-21, 18.12-13, Deuteronomy 18.4). John E. Hartley explains this as “*the first produce and the choicest*”. It included grain, honey, wine, oil, dough, and sheep's fleeces, etc. In addition there were two national firstfruits offerings: the first ripe sheaf during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23.9-14), and two loaves at Pentecost (Leviticus 23.16-20, Numbers 28.26).

Deuteronomy 26.1-11 gives God's instructions for the firstfruits ceremony, to take place at Pentecost. This ceremony may have taken place every year. But the focus of this passage seems to be the very first firstfruits ceremony after Israel has entered the Promised Land and harvested their crops for the very first time. It would have been a specially moving and significant moment in the history of God's people.

Tithes

And the produce of the land was to be tithed (Leviticus 27.30-33, Numbers 18.21-32, Deuteronomy 14.22-29, 26.12-15, and compare Hebrews 7.5). The word ‘tithe’ means ‘tenth’ – the tithe was a 10% portion of the crops, herds and flocks. Taking the different passages together, we see that the bulk of the tithes went to the Levites. The priests also received a portion.

Every third year (more exactly, it seems, the third and sixth years of each seven-year sabbatical cycle) they were also shared with the immigrants, the fatherless and the widows - in other words, those in the community who most needed support.

In the other harvest years, the tithes would go to the Levites. When people presented them, they would use some of them to enjoy a celebratory feast in God's presence which they shared with the Levites (Deuteronomy 14.22-27).



Image courtesy of www.HolyLandPhotos.org
Reconstructed olive press on the top of Tel Hazor, Upper Galilee, Israel. The wooden beam presses down on a heavy stone, that in turn presses down on top of about 10 porous baskets shaped like berets. The baskets rest upon a large white stone. Olives would be crushed, and the resultant mash placed in the baskets. Then, using this type of press, oil would be squeezed out of the mash. The oil would drip on to the lower white stone and flow into channels carved on its surface. From there it would drain into a lower collecting vat.

Sabbaths and Feasts

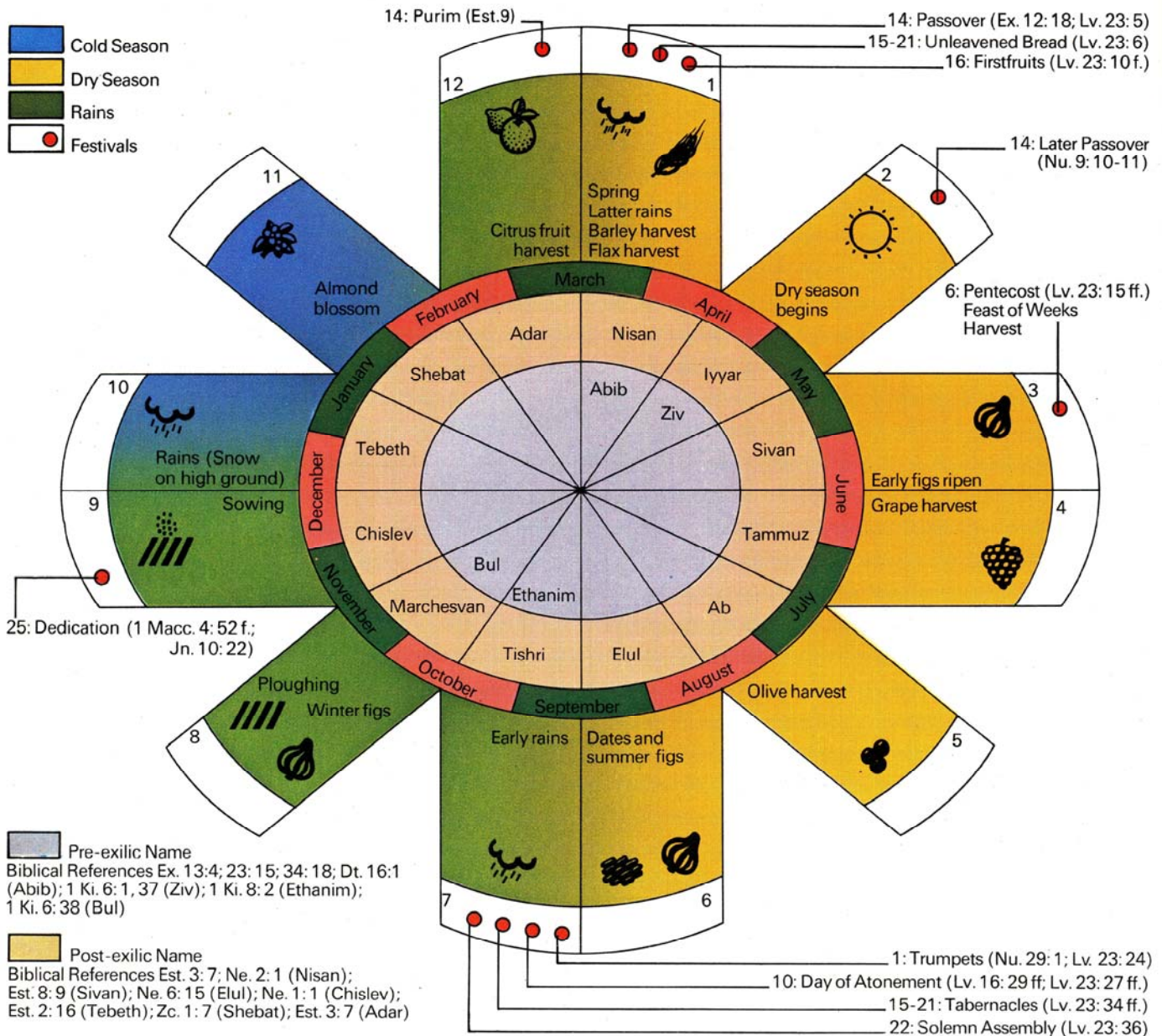


Diagram © Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship

The Hebrew calendar showing seasons and festivals with their modern equivalents

God not only set apart a holy place (the Tabernacle), and holy people (priests and Levites); He also set apart holy times - the Sabbath day, the Sabbath and Jubilee years, holy days and festivals.

The Sabbaths

God had rescued His people from slavery in Egypt. God lived with them, blessed them abundantly and gave them His Law. And one day they would inherit the Promised Land – a new paradise. God had begun to lift the curse and restore the life of blessing that mankind once knew before the Fall.

The Sabbath Day

Sin brought toil and sweat (Genesis 3.19). The Sabbath reversed this; no work was to be done on that day (Exodus 20.8-11, 31.12-17, 34.21, 35.2-3, Leviticus 23.3, Deuteronomy 5.12-15). It was God's appointed day of relief from the toil and sweat brought by the Fall – another step

towards paradise. Now God's people had opportunity to meet with Him and study the scriptures, time for fellowship with family and friends, time to enjoy nature's beauty. As such, it was an opportunity for restoring and enjoying relationships fractured by the Fall.

The Sabbath was a prophecy in action rather than in words - "a shadow of the things to come" (Colossians 2.16-17), a foretaste of the eternal world to come. That's why God thought the Sabbath so important (compare Numbers 15.32-36). There wasn't just a weekly Sabbath – on some of the festival days in the year, too, people were released from their daily chores (see, for example, Leviticus 23.7-8, 24-25).

The Sabbath Year

There was also a Sabbath year (Leviticus 25.1-7, 18-22), when the land wasn't ploughed or sown. The land yielded without toil, a reversal of the curse on the ground. People lived off its natural produce and had leisure during that

year to spend time with God and with their families – a further release from the effects of the Fall. And people were released from debt, too (Deuteronomy 15.1-11) – either from making any repayments due that year, or from the total remaining debt (it's not certain which).

The Year of Jubilee

And every 50th year, the greatest Sabbath of all occurred – the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25.8-55). As well as being a Sabbath year, all Hebrew bondslaves were released and allowed to go home; land or property (with an exception detailed in Leviticus 25.29-30) sold to release capital was returned to those it originally belonged to. For those deprived of land or liberty through poverty, the slate was wiped clean and they could begin again.

On a practical level, the Jubilee year preserved the community. It put a brake on social oppression. It limited the distribution of wealth (and thus the gap between rich and poor). It put a restraint on how much land people could accumulate or how much debt people could accrue. It ensured that families weren't permanently deprived of land that could provide them a livelihood. In Margaret Barker's words, *"The Jubilee recreated society by restoring people to their own land and by removing the burden of slavery and debt."*

It was – in effect – a partial release from the curse, a partial return to the Garden of Eden. As such, therefore, it not only had practical benefits - it foreshadowed what God has in mind for His people in the New Earth. That time will be the perfect Jubilee!

Foot Note Jesus brings our Jubilee

The Year of Jubilee was to be announced on the Day of Atonement. That's very significant. On that day, God's sanctuary was purified and His people were cleansed from sin and forgiven. Only when sin was dealt with was it time for the Jubilee to begin.

Jesus has fulfilled all that took place on the Day of Atonement. He bore our sin and provides cleansing and forgiveness for us. And so He inaugurated our Year of Jubilee. God's people are already released from sin's bondage. For us the Year of Jubilee has already dawned.

And when Jesus comes again, there'll be a complete and final fulfilment of all that the Old Testament Jubilee prefigured. Then there'll be *"new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells"* (2 Peter 3.13); *"the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."* (Romans 8.21).

Holy days and festivals

Several times during the year, God's people gathered to meet with Him at special times of worship. They're detailed in Leviticus 23.4-44. The Hebrew calendar with the holy days and festivals is shown on the previous page. They are collectively called *"feasts of the LORD"* (Leviticus 23.2); the term 'feast' really means 'religious festival', or 'sacred assembly' (Leviticus 23.2,4). They form three festal periods:

① **Early Spring feasts** The spring holy days and festivals were **Passover** on the 14th of the first month, followed immediately by the week-long **Feast of Unleavened Bread** (which we looked at earlier). During this feast, on *"the day after the Sabbath"* (Leviticus 23.11), the Jews offered the **firstfruits** of their cereal harvest.

② **Late Spring feast** Fifty days after Firstfruits, the **Feast of Pentecost** (also called the **Feast of Weeks**) was celebrated (Exodus 34.22, Leviticus 23.15-21, Numbers 28.26-31, Deuteronomy 16.9-12). Another name for the Feast of Pentecost is *"the Feast of Harvest"* (Exodus 23.16). At this feast firstfruits in the form of two loaves were offered.

③ **Autumn feasts** On the first day of the seventh month, the **Feast of Trumpets** was celebrated (Leviticus 23.23-25, Numbers 29.1-6). Trumpets were sounded, and it was *"a day of solemn rest"*. This seventh month was the time when the harvest was completed. It was also the month in which the most momentous day of the year, the **Day of Atonement**, and the most joyful of all the feasts, the **Feast of Tabernacles**, occurred. In Allen Ross's words, the *"trumpets reminded the people of the changing of the season and the year . . . and also awakened them to the season of repentance, pardon, and restoration."*

On the tenth day of this month was the great **Day of Atonement** (which we looked at earlier). On this day God's sanctuary was cleansed and the sins of the entire nation were confessed and removed.

That cleared the way for God's people to celebrate the final and greatest feast of the year: the **Feast of Tabernacles**, also called the **Feast of Booths** or the **Feast of Ingathering**. This began five days after the Day of Atonement and lasted for eight days. We read about this feast in Exodus 34.22, Leviticus 23.33-43, Numbers 29.12-38 and Deuteronomy 16.13-15. It was the most joyful of all the festivals. During this Feast, people were to make shelters or booths – hence the name Booths or Tabernacles. The people lived in these shelters for the first seven days of the feasts.



Image © Tfursten / Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 3.0)

A family celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, 2011, in a temporary booth or 'sukkah', decked with plants and fruit, in accordance with Leviticus 23.42-43. Throughout the holiday, meals are eaten inside the sukkah and many sleep there as well.

Three of these festivals were mandatory (one from each of the three festal seasons): **Unleavened Bread** (which included Passover and Firstfruits), **Pentecost** and the **Feast of Tabernacles** (Exodus 23.14-17, 34.18,21-24, Deuteronomy 16.16-17). God commanded all His people (represented by all the men), to celebrate these three festivals year by year.

Why did God institute these Feasts?

◆ Celebrating the past ◆

Firstly, these seasons were occasions when God's people were to look back at how God had rescued them from slavery in Egypt and brought them into the Promised Land.

The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread

These feasts looked back to the events of the Exodus. The Passover lamb commemorated how the firstborn of those who ate that first Passover lamb were saved from destruction. The Feast of Unleavened Bread reminded them of how they ate their Passover meal hastily, preparing their bread without time to leaven it, ready to leave Egypt at a moment's notice.

The Feast of Pentecost

At this Feast, God's people were to remember that they were once slaves in Egypt (Deuteronomy 16.12) – and now they were free.

The Feast of Tabernacles

During this feast, people were to construct shelters or booths – hence the name Booths or Tabernacles. The people lived in these shelters for the first seven days of the feasts, reminding them of their wilderness wanderings, during which God was present with them and provided for them miraculously, en route to the Promised Land.

◆ Rejoicing in the present ◆

The three festal seasons also interlocked with the harvests. God promised His people that - if they were obedient - He would lift the curse that hindered the earth's productivity and make the Promised Land another Garden of Eden (Leviticus 26.3-5,10, Deuteronomy 7.12-13, 11.13-15, 28.2-5,8,11-12). Three of the feasts celebrate the fruitfulness of the land:

The Feast of Firstfruits

Firstfruits occurred at the beginning of the cereal harvest. The firstfruits of the barley harvest was offered to God.

The Feast of Pentecost

The Feast of Pentecost was also called the **Feast of Harvest** (Exodus 23.16) or the **day of the firstfruits** (Numbers 28.26). In Duane A. Garrett's words, "The primary focus of the festival was gratitude to God for the harvest." It celebrated the harvest of wheat and spelt that ripened later than the barley. On it, the firstfruits of the wheat harvest were offered in the form of two loaves. In John Durham's words, "This 'early crop-harvest' was a further harbinger of the fuller harvest to follow at the end of the agricultural year."

The Feast of Tabernacles

The Feast of Tabernacles or the **Feast of Ingathering** occurred at the end of the agricultural year, after the fruit harvest. It was the most joyful of all the festivals, when people worshipped God and praised Him for the blessings of the year's ingathered crops.



A photograph (doubtless specially posed for the camera) of the grape harvest in Israel, taken between 1920 and 1925.

◆ Looking forward to the future ◆

Finally, these three festal seasons also looked forwards. They pointed ahead to God's plan of salvation through history – a salvation that was to be accomplished through the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

The early spring feasts

Jesus fulfilled the Feast of Passover. He was our Passover Lamb.

Before the Feast of Unleavened Bread, God's people removed the old leaven. They then ate unleavened bread for the duration of the feast. Removing the old leavened dough broke the chain of contamination from one batch to another. This pictures what Jesus's death accomplished. By His death He broke the chain of sin's contamination that began with Adam.

And during this Feast, the Jews offered the **firstfruits** of their cereal harvest. Jesus fulfilled this firstfruits offering. He rose on the day after the Sabbath during the Feast of Unleavened Bread – in other words, He rose *on the very day* that Jews offered their firstfruits. He is the firstfruits (1 Corinthians 15.20,23) - the first to rise from the dead (Colossians 1.18, Revelation 1.5). The rest of the harvest will follow (1 Corinthians 6.14, 15.12-23, 2 Corinthians 4.14).

The Feast of Pentecost

Fifty days after Firstfruits, the **Feast of Pentecost** was celebrated. Accordingly, 50 days after His resurrection on the Feast of Firstfruits, Jesus fulfilled the Feast of Pentecost. On that momentous day, Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit on His waiting disciples (Acts 2.33, and Acts 2.16-18 citing Joel 2.28-29) and God Himself began to live in human hearts (compare John 14.17).

Pentecost was a harvest festival when ingathering of the grain harvest was celebrated. On that great Day of Pentecost God reaped a harvest of around 3,000 souls. And Pentecost was a forerunner of the completion of the harvest at the end of the agricultural year. That Day of Pentecost began a gospel harvest that continues to this day – the greatest harvest the world will ever see.



Image © V. Gilbert and Arlisle F. Beers

A man winnowing grain – tossing it into the air to allow the wind to blow away the lightweight chaff from the heavier grain. Biblical references to winnowing include Ruth 3.2, Isaiah 41.16 and Matthew 3.12.

In later times, the Jews came to associate the Feast of Pentecost with the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. They calculated that the Law was given on the same day of the year – 6th Sivan. At Sinai, God came down in fire (Exodus 19.18, Deuteronomy 5.22-24, Hebrews 12.18-19) and gave His Law. He wrote that law on tablets of stone. Now, on Mount Zion, tongues like fire rest on each of the 120 disciples (Acts 2.3) and God writes His Law on “tablets of human hearts” (2 Corinthians 3.3).

The autumn feasts

Finally, the autumn feasts look forward to the end of this age. The trumpet blasts at the **Feast of Trumpets** signalled the climax of the year and, in Allen Ross’s words, “the season of repentance, pardon, and restoration”. This feast looks forward to the end of the age when “the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God” and gather His people from every age and place to Himself (1 Thessalonians 4.16-17, compare 1 Corinthians 15.52).

After the Feast of Trumpets came the **Day of Atonement**. Jesus fulfilled all that took place on that day (as Hebrews 9.7-8, 11-12, 24-26 tells us). As our great High Priest, He entered the Most Holy Place with His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. And He is our scapegoat – God laid on Him the sin of the world, just as the sin of the nation was laid on that hapless animal (see Isaiah 53.6).

And when Jesus comes again, all that He accomplished on

the Cross will come into full and final effect. Satan and his hordes will be cast into hell, his dark kingdom will be dismantled and destroyed, and all God’s faithful people will be perfect, free from sin for ever. Hebrews 9.28 tells us, “Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him”. F.F. Bruce comments: “. . . our author thinks of Jesus as going into the heavenly holy of holies, to reappear one day in order to confirm finally to His people the salvation which His perfect offering has procured for them”.

After the Day of Atonement, came the **Feast of Tabernacles**. The ultimate fulfilment of this final feast will be at the end of the age. Then God’s end-time harvest (see Matthew 13.39) will be gathered in and all His people will enjoy perfect rest and joy in New Heaven and Earth. Zechariah 14.16 alludes to this. He prophesies that people will go up to worship God and keep the Feast of Tabernacles - a picture of the time when all God’s promises will be fulfilled and His people rejoice in the blessings that John the Apostle describes so vividly: “. . . the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more,” (Revelation 21.3-4).

So these three autumn feasts – **Trumpets**, the **Day of Atonement**, and the **Feast of Tabernacles** - point forward successively to three great events at the end of this age: Jesus’s second coming, the final removal of sin from creation, and the establishment of God’s eternal kingdom.



You can see how perfectly the Feasts foreshadow God’s plan of redemption for mankind through Jesus Christ from the Cross to the coming glory. My salvation and yours was pictured and symbolised thousands of years ago by God’s Old Testament people. How awesome is that!

Next Session From Sinai to Solomon

We trace the history of God’s people from Sinai through the wilderness, into the Promised Land and on into the time of Solomon – the high point of Israel’s glory.

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In this early evening photograph, the sun has already set for this group navigating between giant red boulders on the northeastern flank of the mountain’. Image published at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hiking_on_Mount_Sinai.jpg and made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported licence (viewable at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>). Image cropped. ► Image on page 11 (reading from the Torah) copyright © Sagie Maoz from Ashdod, Israel / Wikipedia (whose profile is at <http://www.flickr.com/people/37603552@N00>) and described as ‘Boy reading from the Torah according to Sephardic custom’. Image published at http://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Torah_Reading_Sephardic_custom.jpg and made available under a Creative Commons Erkännande-DelaLika 2.0 Generisk licence (viewable at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/deed.sv>). 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