

חג הסוכות

The Feast of Sukkot

Vayyiqra [Leviticus] 23:33-44

The Command from YHWH

Vayyiqra [Leviticus] 23:33

And YHWH spoke to Moshe, saying,

The command to keep and observe the feast of Sukkot comes directly from YHWH through Moshe to Israel. This is a commanded observance. Furthermore, He has commanded for us to do certain things that we do not want to leave out. We also want to do them in the way that He commanded them to be done. Some things have latitude in them. Other things are quite specific in how we are to do them.

Not only do we want to follow the letter of the command, but even more importantly, we desire to follow the spirit of the command. When we walk in His Spirit in the observance and keeping of His commands, then we know that we will be keeping them in a manner that is pleasing to Him. However, if one only keeps the letter of the command, but not the spirit, then he will not be walking in a manner that is pleasing to our heavenly Father YHWH.

When and How Long

Vayyiqra [Leviticus] 23:34

“Speak to the children of Israel, saying, ‘On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the feast of Sukkot for seven days to YHWH.’”

The Scriptural calendar is based upon the sighting of the new crescent moon each month. In the spring of the year the sighting of the new crescent moon that coincides with the sighting of

the aviv barley is the beginning of the New Year. It is from this sighting that we begin the counting of the months. When we get to the sighting of the seventh new crescent moon, then we are in the time of the fall feasts.

It is on the fifteenth day of the seventh month that we are to begin our celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot). As we will see below, this celebration is to last for seven days plus one day. We should gather together with other talmidim to celebrate this feast.

Devarim [Deuteronomy] 16:16

“Three times in a year shall all your males appear before YHWH your Elohim in the place which He shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles; and they shall not appear before YHWH empty.”

There are to be three times in a year that we are to gather together to meet YHWH and to be with His people. One of those times is the feast of Sukkot or Tabernacles. It states in the above verse that we are to gather in the place that He will choose to place His name. Historically, in the past that place was Jerusalem. However, today most of us cannot go to Jerusalem to celebrate one feast a year, let alone three feasts a year.

But there is also another thing to prayerfully consider. Does His name dwell there now? Let us consider this from a Scriptural point of view. What does it mean for His name to dwell there?

Yehoshua [Joshua] 18:1

And the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled themselves together at Shiloh, and set up the tent of meeting there; and the land was subdued before them.

When YHWH first brought Israel into the land under the leadership of Yehoshua son of Nun (pronounced *noon*), He had them set up the tent of meeting at Shiloh. He caused His name to dwell there. It is important for us to understand that when YHWH speaks of His name dwelling in a place, that He is speaking of the mishkan being there, or the temple. One or the other has to be present and being used for His name to dwell somewhere on earth.

This is what YHWH clearly states in this next passage.

Yirmeyah [Jeremiah] 7:12-14

12 “But you go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I caused My name to dwell at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel.

13 And now, because you have done all these works,” says YHWH, “and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you heard not; and I called you, but you answered not; 14 therefore will I do to the house which is called by My name, wherein you trust, and to the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh.”

Not only did YHWH cause His name to stop dwelling in Shiloh by removing the mishkan, but He also laid it in ruins. He states that He will do likewise to Jerusalem. Did He not do this in 70 A.D.?

Yirmeyah [Jeremiah] 26:6

“then will I make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth.”

While Jerusalem has been rebuilt, neither the mishkan nor the temple has been set up again. Does His name dwell there as before? No. Will it dwell there again one day in the future? Yes, to be sure, it will. But that day is not yet.

So, while a person could certainly go up to Jerusalem and gather together to celebrate His feasts and it would not be wrong to do this, His name does not now dwell there as He made it to dwell there in the past. Today, for us in the Diaspora, we need to gather together so that He can be in our midst as a people. When we do this in His great name, then He will come and meet with us.

In Devarim 16:16 we are commanded to gather three times a year, and that when we do we are not to come empty-handed. We are to bring an offering. This offering is to be from the fruit of our increase. We may use part of our tithe to come to the feast and celebrate and have a good time. Let us be generous to YHWH that our celebration to Him with our brethren can be a wonderful time of feasting and fellowship.

Miqra Qodesh

Vayyiqra [Leviticus] 23:35

“On the first day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no servile work.”

So what is a “holy convocation”? What does it mean to “do no servile work”? These are important questions that we need to answer so that our celebrations will be pleasing in His sight.

The first question deals with a “miqra qodesh” - מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ. “Miqra” means a *sacred assembly* and “qodesh” means *to be set-apart*. So a “miqra qodesh” means a very set-apart sacred assembly. So what all is classified as a miqra qodesh?

In Vayyiqra 23:3, we are told that the weekly Shabbat is a miqra qodesh, a time for a set-apart sacred assembly, or gathering together. Then in Vayyiqra 23:6-7, we are told that the first day and the seventh day of the seven days of Unleavened Bread, is also each a miqra qodesh. In Vayyiqra 23:21, we learn that Shavuot (Pentecost) is also a miqra qodesh. In Vayyiqra 23:24, we learn that Yom Teruah, the Day of Sounding or the Feast of Trumpets, is also a miqra qodesh. In Vayyiqra 23:27, we see that Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is a miqra qodesh. And finally, we see in Vayyiqra 23:35,36, that the first day and the eighth day of Sukkot is each a miqra qodesh.

What this means for us, is that whenever there is a miqra qodesh, we are commanded to gather together with other believers and celebrate and worship YHWH our Elohim. We are to do this on a weekly basis on the Shabbat. We are also commanded to do this seven other times throughout the year.

So what does it mean to do no servile work? The Hebrew here is מְלֶאכֶת עֲבֹדָה – “m’le’ket ‘avodah.” The root word for מְלֶאכֶת is מְלַאֵךְ – “mal’ak” which means a *messenger* or *one sent to do a task*. The form of the word here means *work* or *occupation*. This word is also in the construct form. The root word for עֲבֹדָה is עָבַד – “avad” which means *to work* or *to serve*. The form of the word here in this passage means *labor* or *service*. Thus, these two words together mean the work that one does as his normal occupation is not to be done during a miqra qodesh. Quite literally it would be understood as the *work of labor*.

What do you do on most days of the week? It is whatever you do for pay: your job; or, for a mother, it is doing laundry, cooking, and all the other things that she does to take care of her family. To do no servile work means, that for that day, we put all those things aside and focus upon YHWH. We get all the preparations done ahead of time so that this is possible.

Shemini Atzeret

Vayyiqra [Leviticus] 23:36

“Seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to YHWH; on the eighth day shall be a holy convocation to you; and you shall offer an offering made by fire to YHWH; it is a solemn assembly; you shall do no servile work.”

The last day of Sukkot, the eighth day, is known as “Shemini Atzaret.” Where does this name come from and what does it mean? To find the title for this day, we have to go to the companion passage found in B’midbar 29, verse 35 in particular.

On the eighth day you shall have a solemn assembly; you shall do no servile work;	בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי עֲצֵרֶת תִּהְיֶה לָּכֶם כָּל מְלָאכָת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ
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We are interested in the first three words of this passage at present.

עֲצֵרֶת – a-tze-ret	הַשְּׁמִינִי – ha-sh-mi-ni	בַּיּוֹם – ba-yom
an assembly	the eighth	in the day

We are to have a set-apart assembly in the eighth day of the feast of Sukkot. So the name of this day then is a simple reminder of this commandment.

Set Apart Feasts

Vayyiqra [Leviticus] 23:37

“These are the set feasts of YHWH, which you shall proclaim to be miqra qodesh, to offer an offering made by fire to YHWH, a burnt-offering, and a meal-offering, a sacrifice, and drink-offerings, each on its own day;”

Sukkot, along with other commanded set-apart times, is to be one of the other feasts or “mo’edim” (plural for mo’ed). The Hebrew word here is מוֹעֲדֵי – “mo’adei,” with the root word being מוֹעֵד – “mo’ed” which means *appointed time, place or meeting*. In this passage, we find it in the construct form; literally rendered as the *appointed time of YHWH*.

The appointed times of YHWH include the annual feasts, the fourteenth of Aviv (Pesach), the weekly Shabbat, and Rosh Chodesh according to Scripture, particularly Vayyaqra 23 and B’midbar 28-29. In B’midbar 28 and 29 we find all the mo’edim, including the weekly Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh (new moon) all listed between verses 28:2 and 29:39. These two verses act as a set of brackets so that we know that each one listed in between these two verses is an appointed time set by YHWH Himself.

Each day then is to have its own offerings and sacrifices, each along with its proper drink offerings and meal offerings.

Gifts and Offerings

Vayyiqra [Leviticus] 23:38

“besides the shabbatot of YHWH, and besides your gifts, and besides all your vows, and besides all your freewill-offerings, which you give to YHWH.”

Each day is to have offerings and sacrifices that YHWH has commanded. These are to be done as a nation by the Levitical priesthood. Along with these, individuals also give gifts and freewill offerings to YHWH. This is to show one’s gratitude and thanksgiving for the manifold blessings that YHWH has given to the individual person throughout the year, and in particular, all the blessings of harvest that has just been completed.

Keeping this in mind, we should understand what it was that Yeshua taught us concerning the giving of our offerings.

Matithyah [Matthew] 5:23-24

***23 “If therefore you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,
24 leave there your gift before the altar, and go your way, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”***

Notice that Yeshua is not speaking of sacrifices that are mandatory according to His commandments. He is speaking of those gifts and offerings that we bring that are extra. There should never be a delay in doing what YHWH requires of us in our relationship with Him. It is first and foremost in all that we do. But what is being spoken of here, is one’s offerings and gifts.

The principle here is found in the following passage.

Yochanan Aleph [1st John] 4:20

If a man says, “I love Elohim”, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, cannot love Elohim whom he has not seen.

When we come to bring our gifts and offerings to YHWH, we first need to be at peace with our brothers, as far as it is possible with us. We need to do what we can to rectify relationships with our brothers. However, there will be those times that there will not be peace, not because

of oneself, but rather because of the other person. In such cases, we just need to put the situation in His hands and allow Him to deal with it as He wills.

A Solemn Rest

Vayyiqra [Leviticus] 23:39

“Howbeit on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruits of the land, you shall keep the feast of YHWH seven days; on the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest.”

YHWH tells us that on the first day and on the eighth day of Sukkot is to be a “solemn rest”. But just exactly what is a “solemn rest”? The Hebrew word here in both cases is שְׁבֻתוֹן – “shabbaton.” This word is found thirteen times in eleven verses in the Torah Moshe; three of those in the book of Shemot (Exodus) and the rest of them in the book of Vayyiqra (Leviticus). The verse above is one of the two verses in which this word occurs twice.

Several times this word is immediately preceded by the word שַׁבַּת – “Shabbat.” So the question before us is this, what is a “Shabbat Shabbaton”; and how do we properly understand the word “shabbaton”?

As we can easily see, the word “shabbaton” comes from the word “Shabbat.” The word שַׁבַּת – “shabbat” means *to stop work, curtail activity before completion*. שְׁבֻתוֹן – “Shabbaton” seems to be the compounding of שַׁבַּת and אוֹן. Often when making compound words in Hebrew, letters are dropped, in this case the aleph is dropped adding the וֹן – *on* which is pronounced with a long o sound as in the English word *own*. This word, אוֹן means *to acquire*. So what we have with the word שְׁבֻתוֹן would mean *to acquire a cessation of work or an acquired cessation of work*. With the coupling of these two words together we would have an emphatic command not to work.

The word שְׁבֻתוֹן occurs with some of the mo’edim, but not all of them. It is important for us to examine these days that are shabbaton, and those that are not, and the reason that those days that are not shabbaton are not listed as such.

There are only four of the seven yearly high days that are spoken of in the Torah as being Shabbaton, days of complete rest. The other three days that are not Shabbaton, are not for very specific reasons, as we are about to discuss. Let us put these days before us in the form of a list for easy reference.

Days listed as Shabbaton

1. The weekly Shabbat – the seventh day of the week
2. Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement, the tenth day of the seventh month
3. Yom Teruah – the Day of Sounding, the first day of the seventh month
4. The first day of Sukkot – the fifteenth day of the seventh month
5. The eighth day of Sukkot – the twenty-second day of the seventh month
6. The Shemitah – the year of land rest

First let us examine the weekly Shabbat as a Shabbaton to see what this means so that we can apply this same standard set in the Torah to the other days.

Shemot [Exodus] 16:23

And he said to them, “This is that which YHWH has spoken, ‘Tomorrow is a solemn rest, a holy Shabbat to YHWH; bake that which you will bake, and boil that which you will boil; and all that remains over lay up for you to be kept until the morning.’ ”

This passage is speaking of the weekly Shabbat on the seventh day. Notice that there is to be no cooking on this day. All the cooking is to be done before that day begins. This is a very important aspect of what makes a Shabbaton. We will come back to this again, so keep this in the forefront of your memory.

Shemot [Exodus] 31:15

Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Shabbat of solemn rest, holy to YHWH; whosoever does any work on the Shabbat day, he shall surely be put to death.

Working on the Shabbat carries the death penalty! There are no exceptions. Please brethren, do not try to reason this away with something like you are under grace and YHWH knows your heart and He will understand. Stop! This is extremely serious. Your eternal life and well-being hangs in the balance here. Is this something that you really want to gamble with? Particularly considering that YHWH has already told us that working on the Shabbat carries the death penalty? What part of that don't you understand? So, are you going to obey His commandments or not?

Such is a Shabbaton. When a day is a Shabbaton, we are not to cook on this day, nor are we to work on this day!

Shemot [Exodus] 35:2

Six days shall work be done; but on the seventh day there shall be to you a holy day, a Shabbat of solemn rest to YHWH; whosoever does any work therein shall be put to death.

Here is a second witness that working on the weekly Shabbat carries the death penalty.

Next, we see that Yom Teruah, also known as the Day of Trumpets is a Shabbaton as well.

Vayyiqra [Leviticus] 23:24

“Speak to the children of Israel, saying, ‘In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, shall be a solemn rest to you, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation.’ ”

Then we see from two separate passages that Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement is a Shabbaton as well.

Vayyiqra [Leviticus] 16:31

It is a Shabbat of solemn rest to you, and you shall afflict your souls; it is a statute forever.”

And again;

Vayyiqra [Leviticus] 23:30-32

30 “And whatsoever soul it be that does any manner of work in that same day, that soul will I destroy from among his people.

31 You shall do no manner of work; it is a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

32 It shall be to you a Shabbat of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; in the ninth day of the month at even, from even to even, shall you keep your Shabbat.”

Then we come to Sukkot, in which we find that both the first day and the eighth day are Shabbaton.

Vayyiqra [Leviticus] 23:39

“Howbeit on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruits of the land, you shall keep the feast of YHWH seven days; on the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest.”

Then just as a side note which we will need to deal with later in a separate study, the Shemitah year, or the year of the land Shabbat, it is a Shabbaton as well.

Vayyiqra [Leviticus] 25:3-5

3 “Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in the fruits thereof;

4 but in the seventh year shall be a Shabbat of solemn rest for the land, a Shabbat to YHWH; you shall neither sow your field, nor prune your vineyard.

5 That which grows of itself of your harvest you shall not reap, and the grapes of your undressed vine you shall not gather; it shall be a year of solemn rest for the land.”

This is a brief examination of each of the ten verses where the word “Shabbaton” is found in the Torah, or for that matter, all of the Tanak.

The first and seventh days of Unleavened Bread are not listed as Shabbaton, and neither is Shavuot; but there are very good reasons why these three days are not listed as Shabbaton. Let us examine those reasons now.

Please note what the following passage teaches us.

Shemot [Exodus] 12:16

“And in the first day there shall be to you a holy convocation, and in the seventh day a holy convocation; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done by you.”

YHWH gives us a very specific exemption for the first and last days of Unleavened Bread. That exemption is that food which we cook on those days, to be eaten on those days, may be cooked. It is for this reason, that these days are not called Shabbaton. It is for this very reason that Shavuot is also not a Shabbaton.

Vayyiqra [Leviticus] 23:17

“You shall bring out of your habitations two wave-loaves of two tenth parts of an ephah; they shall be of fine flour, they shall be baked with leaven, for first-fruits to YHWH.”

YHWH also commands us to bake two loaves of bread to be done on the day of Shavuot. Therefore, once again we see why YHWH does not call Shavuot a Shabbaton.

So we see that there are some very specific exclusions that YHWH gives to us concerning what days are Shabbaton. The days that YHWH calls Shabbaton, are days in which no work and no cooking are to be done. These days include the first and eighth days of Sukkot.

Lulav

Vayyiqra [Leviticus] 23:40

“And you shall take you on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees, and boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before YHWH your Elohim seven days.”

There are boughs of four species of trees that we are commanded to take on the first day of Sukkot, and to rejoice with before YHWH. Some see this rejoicing as waving. And most likely that is certainly a part of it. The word for “rejoice” here in the Hebrew text is וְשִׂמְחֶתֶם – “usmachten,” of which the root is שָׂמַח – “samach,” which means “to rejoice or to express positive feelings.” It is from this word that we get שָׂמֵחַ – “sameach” which means “happy, glad or merry”; and שִׂמְחָה – “simchah” which means “joy, happiness, celebration, or festivity.” The form of the word here in this passage is the perfect second person masculine plural, thus – “you shall rejoice.” The “you” here means the whole nation.

Furthermore, this is to be done for seven days.

Now, unless a person can afford to go to Israel during this time, it is most likely too expensive to buy and have shipped to him, these four species. So what we need to understand is what these four species represent, and what they are that we might select four native species wherever we happen to live.

The הָדָר – “hadar”; it is also known as the “etrog” or “citron” is a fruit from a type of citrus tree. This represents the heart. Then there is the תְּמָרִים – “t’marim” or palm tree which represents the spine and how we are to be straight before YHWH. Then there is the עֲבֹת – “avot” or the leafy tree, sometimes called a myrtle. This represents the eyes to show that we are to look towards YHWH for our salvation and life. Then there is the עֲרָבָה – “aravah” or the willow, the tree of the river valleys. This represents the lips and how we should speak only those things that are pleasing to our heavenly Father.

With all four of these species in hand we are declaring the need to serve YHWH with our whole being.

Throughout Your Generations

Vayyiqra [Leviticus] 23:41

“And you shall keep it a feast to YHWH seven days in the year; it is a statute for ever throughout your generations; you shall keep it in the seventh month.”

This festival is to be kept and observed every year forever and ever. It is a statute that never ceases throughout our generations. It is to be done in the seventh month and we are to do it for seven days plus the Last Great Day, the eighth day.

When we see something that YHWH has commanded us as a perpetual statute, then we need to pay attention and heed this commandment. We need to obey Him in these matters. When we do, it will be life to us and not death.

Devarim [Deuteronomy] 30:19

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life, that you may live, you and your seed;”

Seven Days

Vayyiqra [Leviticus] 23:42

“You shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are home-born in Israel shall dwell in booths;”

For seven days each year we are to live in temporary dwellings. This is to remind us that once we were slaves in a foreign land. It is to remind us that YHWH brought us out with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm to deliver us. It is to remind us that this life is only temporary and that there is a permanent world coming that we should have a desire to be a part of. But we need to have proper focus. Sukkot is one of many yearly reminders that we are to have a proper focus upon YHWH and His kingdom rather than upon the physical nature of this world and its passing pleasures and lusts.

Knowledge Passed On

Vayyiqra [Leviticus] 23:43

“that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt; I am YHWH your Elohim.”

This is one of the things that Sukkot is supposed to remind us of that we are to pass on to our children.

Obedience

Vayyiqra [Leviticus] 23:44

And Moshe declared to the children of Israel the set feasts of YHWH.

YHWH has declared to us through Moshe what it is that He expects from us. We each must choose what we will do. We can obey Him in this and all matters pertaining to His commandments, which will bring us eternal life. Or, we can do whatever it is that we desire to do and this will bring us death. It is our choice. YHWH will not choose for us.

May YHWH bless you as you choose to keep His set-apart times, and may He increase your faith, understanding, and obedience to Him in all matters pertaining to life!

Amein and Amein.

Shabbat Shalom

Zerubbabel ben Emunah

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