

Sacred Times and Spaces: Leviticus 23-27 (P) + Numbers 1-9 (P)

1. Leviticus, continued

Lev 23: Sacred times

- Outline of sacred calendar is here framed in terms of God's words to Moses: "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: These are my fixed times, the fixed times of the LORD, which you shall proclaim as sacred occasions." The Hebrew term for "fixed time" (*moed*, pl. *moadim*) is also found in P's creation account: "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons (*moadim*) and for days and years" (Gen 1:14).
- With the exception of Sukkot (Festival of Booths), no explanation is here given in terms of why these festivals are celebrated, although this information is given elsewhere in the Pentateuch.

Verse	Festival	When and what, according to Lev 23	Other references in the Pentateuch and historical associations there explored
3	Sabbath	Weekly on 7 th day; no work	Creation of the world, see Gen 2:2-3; also Ex 34:21, etc, etc, etc.
5-8	Passover + Unleavened Bread (Pesach)	Passover offering made at twilight on 14 th day of 1 st month (here Nisan). "Feast of unleavened bread" = one week, beginning on 15 th day of 1 st month: eating unleavened bread throughout + sacrifices; first and last day = no work. In ancient Israel, this would have been concurrent with the spring barley harvest.	Exodus from Egypt, see Exod. 12:6 and Deut. 16:1-8; also Num. 28:16-25
9-21	First fruits + counting of 7 weeks after Passover (Counting of the Omer) + Feast of Weeks (Shavuot; also called Pentecost)	Concurrent with summer wheat harvest: first fruits of harvest go to priest, who raises the first sheaf of the harvest (Hebrew: <i>omer</i>) before the LORD and offers burnt offerings and other sacrifices; nothing of the harvest to be eaten until offering made. Seven weeks to be counted from there (7 weeks = 49 days; hence the title "Pentecost," from Greek for 50), after which Shavuot: offering of new grain + animals and no work.	Exod. 34:26 Num. 28:26-31
23-25	Trumpets (Teruah)	1 st day of 7 th month (Tishri): "a day of complete rest, a holy convocation commemorated with trumpet blasts" + sacrifices	Num. 29:1-6; later associated with New Year (<i>Rosh Hashanah</i>) and with the Creation of the cosmos (Gen 1-3) and the Binding of Isaac (Gen 22)
26-32	Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)	10 th day of 7 th month (Tishri): denial, sacrifice, no work	Lev. 16; Num. 29:7-11
33-36	Feast of Booths (Sukkot; Feast of Ingathering)	15 th day of 7 th month (Tishri) for seven days (in ancient Israel, concurrent with autumn harvest). First day "holy convocation"; no work. Seven days of sacrifice. Eighth day: sacrifice + no work. ALSO: "On the first day you shall take the fruit of majestic trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook... You shall live in booths for seven days; all that are citizens in Israel shall live in booths, so that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt"; see also Exod. 23:16 and Deut. 16:13-15.	

Lev 25: Equivalent of human Sabbath for the earth of the Promised Land:

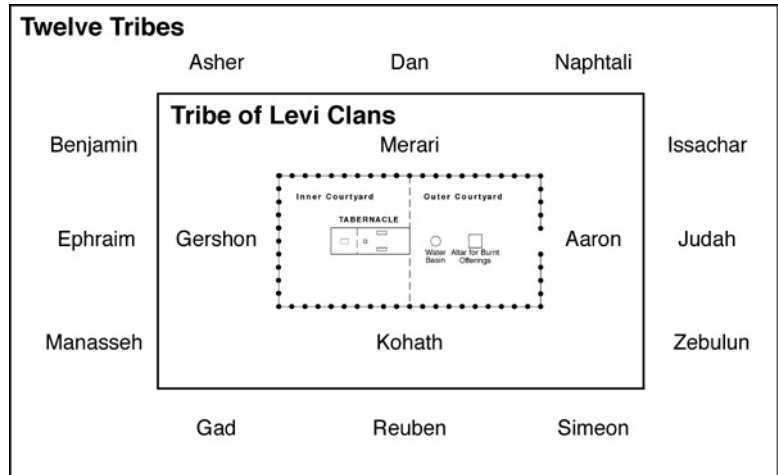
- 7-year cycle of planting: six years of sowing and pruning of fields and vineyards, followed by one year of no sowing or pruning.
- 49-year cycle: after "seven weeks of years" (lit. 7 x 7 = 49), a Jubilee year beginning on Yom Kippur: all holdings returned, all property reverts. This is predicated on the idea that the Land belongs to God alone; Israelites are only borrowing it.

2. Numbers 1-9: Continuation of Priestly prescriptions

Numbers, like Exodus and in contrast to Leviticus, combines legal and narrative material – and also integrates multiple sources. The beginning, however, is attributed to P and is a continuation of the Priestly prescriptions in Leviticus. Similarly, these chapters are set in the encampment at Sinai.

Num 1-4: Census of the tribes¹

- First, everyone assembled and registered “in their clans, by their ancestral houses,” corresponding to the eleven sons of Jacob/Israel (all but Levi) + two sons of Joseph: Reuben, Simeon, Gad, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph (double portion: Ephraim and Manasseh), Benjamin, Dan, Asher, Naphtali = twelve in all. These divisions each have a camp of their own, arrayed around the Tabernacle, and these divisions determine how they travel. The arrangement is aimed towards having military-age members of each tribe defend the camp and Tabernacle during their upcoming journey.
- Levites are set apart and have their own census. They are appointed over the Tabernacle to take care of it and all its equipment during the upcoming travel to the Promised Land; they camp right around the Tabernacle and guard it. They are exempt from military duty.
- The setting aside of Levites for service to God is likened to a substitution in redemption of the first-born of all other Israelites: “Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: I hereby accept the Levites from among the Israelites as substitutes for all the firstborn that open the womb among the Israelites. The Levites shall be mine, for all the firstborn are mine; when I killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn in Israel, both human and animal; they shall be mine. I am the LORD” (3:11-13).



Num 5: Non-priests' roles in maintaining the purity of the camp = to ensure that the camp remains fit for God's presence in the Tabernacle, ritually impure Israelites must go outside of the camp. Disputes should be resolved through confession and restitution. Moral impurity is discussed in terms of suspected adultery.

Num 6:1:21: Nazirites = those (whether men or women!) who voluntarily set themselves apart for God through a special vow. They have special restrictions: not to drink alcohol of any sort, not to consume vinegar, grape juice, grapes; not to cut hair at all; not to go near a corpse, even at the death of a family member.

Num 6:22-27: Priests as direct mediators between God and Israel = revelation of the Priestly Blessing to be given by Aaron and his sons (i.e., the priesthood) to the people, to "put My name (i.e., YHWH) on the Israelites, and I will bless them."

Num 7: Tribal leaders as mediators between God and priesthood = Sacrifices offered by heads of each tribe on behalf of them, an alternate paradigm of relationship between political/military leaders and priesthood (cf. Moses and Aaron).

Num 8:1-4: Construction of menorah (7 candle candelabra) for Tabernacle on the basis of divine blueprint.

Num 8:5-26: Consecration of Levites for service = after cleansing through water, shaving entire body, washing clothes and bodies, a ritual of atonement and symbolic actions whereby Levites are likened to sacrifices: Two young bulls are taken, and Levites are brought before Israelites who lay their hands upon the Levites, who in turn lay their hands upon the head of the bulls, one for sin offering and one for a whole burnt offering. Levites themselves are presented as "elevation offering" to God.

Num 9:1-10:10: Second Passover (first after the actual Passover and hence first festival of remembrance).

¹ Image from http://www.hope.edu/academic/religion/bandstra/RTOT/CH4/CH4_TBD.JPG