

Declarations of the Messiah

Leviticus 23

Introduction

We will complete the study of the book of Leviticus today. If I had said that before we began this study, you would probably have said, "Amen and Amen!" However, I expect you have found in this book, a friend.

This study, in fact, represents part of the completion of our study of the Pentateuch, of nearly eighty discussions, as we make our way through the entire Bible. What a thrill it is to be gathered with people who love and honor God's Word. We, because it was written by Him, take it at face value and understand that it is profitable in all of its writings. So, we have studied books like Leviticus.

I again today, draw your attention to the book of Leviticus and ask you to turn to chapter 23. I have so much to give to you on the Jewish feasts. I told my wife that I wished, on this particular day, that I was a Jewish scholar because the feasts are brand new to me. Sure, I had to go through them in Bible college and in seminary, but that was just to pass a test! In other words, the old rote memory kicked in and I forgot everything on the Monday after the test! Now, however, it is time to learn it and communicate it and I feel somewhat at a loss, but will try to communicate it well.

So today, I want to draw a thick, bold line from the book of Leviticus to the gospel of John. So you might want to turn to the gospel of John and hold your finger there. I think it is appropriate, as we study the Pentateuch, that we will declare Jesus Christ as Messiah. We will draw a line from the feasts in chapter 23 of Leviticus to the gospel of John, in which the person of Jesus Christ presents Himself as the Messiah.

Seven feasts of Israel

Now there are seven feasts given to the nation Israel. They include:

- Passover – Leviticus 23:5;
- Unleavened Bread – Leviticus 23:6;
- First Fruits – Leviticus 23:10;

- Weeks/Pentecost – Leviticus 23:16;
- Trumpets – Leviticus 23:24;
- Atonement – Leviticus 23:27;
- Tabernacles – Leviticus 23:34.

There were three of these feasts in which God enjoined the men, the sons of the nation, to come and present themselves in His presence. Of course, when they were wandering in the wilderness, this was done at the tent of the meeting, which we have previously studied. At the time of Christ, this occurred in the magnificent temple. The sons of the nation were to come and present themselves during Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths. We are going to cover two of these today – Passover and The Feast of Tabernacles – and then, sum up the whole thought of the feasts in Leviticus.

Feast of Passover

We will begin by looking at the Feast of Passover. Turn to chapter 23 of Leviticus, verses 1 through 5.

The Lord spoke again to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'The Lord's appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations – My appointed times are these: For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the Lord in all your dwellings. These are the appointed times of the Lord, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at the times appointed for them. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the Lord's Passover.'"

Now, for the Jew, the time of Passover is an exciting time. For weeks prior to the special day, there are people repairing the roads and the bridges in anticipation of the hundreds of thousands, if not millions of Jews who will come to celebrate Passover.

It is hard for us to understand this glorious occasion, but it was magnificent. It is estimated that as many as three million Jews poured into the Holy City to worship their God during this festival season. Do not be alarmed at that, as the temple where they

worshiped was capable of housing two hundred thousand Jews at one time. It was a big place!

It was at this time, and in fact, we are going to study this in the gospel of John, that Jesus Christ decided to present Himself as their Messiah. All of these seven feasts – tuck this thought into your mind – declared that Israel was a nation in waiting. What were they waiting for? They were waiting for the Messiah.

All of these feasts point, in prophetic brilliance, toward the One who would come and be the anti-type of all that it spoke; that is, the person of Jesus Christ. So, in the gospel of John, He will come at the time of Passover and present Himself as their Messiah. I am getting ahead of myself, so let me get back to our discussion of Passover.

Now, if you are a Jew and you are coming to Passover for the first time, let us say you come through the Sushan Gate, which is located near the now-closed Eastern Gate. You would ascend some stairs and find yourself on a porch. This is not like your grandmother's porch that winds around the house, this is a porch that stretches as long as four football fields, end to end. It was known as Solomon's porch.

On Solomon's porch, there would be chairs lined up at intervals, so that during the festival season, the rabbis could sit and teach the people. Passover was not just a feast, it was a fantastic prophecy conference. Passover was a Bible conference to which the people came from miles around and would sit at the feet of the rabbis to hear them teach. The rabbis would declare the prophecies related to the One who was coming and who would be the ultimate Passover Lamb.

Solomon's porch was also the place where Jesus taught. In fact, it was the place where the apostles taught the early believers before they had their place of worship.

Now, when you were beyond this, the eastern entrance to the inner court was known as the Beautiful Gate. Its doors, I have read this week, were so massive that it would take twenty priests to open and close them. They were plated with Corinthian brass, which was artistically designed. It was a magnificent setting.

When you entered that gate, you would find yourself in the inner court. Inside that court, as we have previously studied, the first thing that you would

approach, at least in this temple, would be the magnificent altar. I have mentioned the size of that altar in the past as being 45 feet square and 15 feet high. So, the only way the priests could get to the top, where there would be a grating recessed into the altar, would be to walk up huge ramps. At the top of the ramps there would be a platform built around the altar.

On that altar platform would be several things. One would be several stone tables with tethering rings located near the priests where they would tie the animals. On the tables, they would prepare the carcasses for sacrifice.

Now, beyond this altar would be the laver. We have probably thought about the laver as similar to our bathroom sinks. It is in fact, quite different. This laver was so huge that it could accommodate twenty priests washing themselves ceremonially at the same time. The basin rested upon twenty brass lions. We get the idea that this was a rather big place.

Beyond this would be the holy place inside the inner court. As you may remember, the holy place held the utensils and then, beyond a curtain, would be the holy of holies or the most holy place. The holy place was an incredible sight. I could only read about it and am short on words to try to explain to you what I have read.

The holy place was made of white stone, carved from the nearby mountainside, with pillars outside the main doors that guarded the place. The white pillars held up that brilliant white building. In the holy place would be the altar of incense, the table of shewbread, and all the things that we studied in the past. The doors guarding the holy place were plated with gold.

Josephus, the historian who lived during a period of time that he could observe this, wrote that if you looked at it from a distance, the holy place seemed to be a mountain covered with snow. If the sun reflected off the brilliant gold laden doors and other parts that were laden with gold, you could hardly see it because the sight of the reflection would be too brilliant for your eyes.

The golden doors guarded the holy place from anyone entering except the Levites, the priestly privileged people. Inside these doors were several great clusters of grapes hanging from golden chains, symbolizing the goodness of God. These grapes were fashioned from solid gold into gold clusters. They were constantly being enlarged because people were wanting to give materially, in thanks to their God.

They would give a grape or two and that cluster was constantly growing in its magnificence.

I hope you can picture this and see it a little differently than you may have thought about it before. This was a magnificent place, and at this place would be two hundred thousand Jews at one time worshipping God during the Passover.

The Passover represented the giving of the burnt offering and several other things. They would not only thank God for His goodness and grace, and for their deliverance, but they would look forward to a Messiah.

Three significant factors

Let me give three factors that are significant about Passover.

1. Number one, Passover represented deliverance from judgement through the lamb.

The lamb was their substitute. Its blood was placed on the doorposts so that when the angel of death swept through Egypt, the Israelites were not harmed. The blood of that lamb kept them alive.

So, on every Passover, every Jew remembered that a lamb had died so that they might live. That is a beautiful picture of salvation.

2. Number two, Passover represented deliverance from the enemy; that is, the grasp of Pharaoh.

As a result of this deliverance, the people could live in a beautiful, dependent relationship upon God. That is a wonderful illustration of sanctification.

3. Number three, the Passover looked forward to ultimate deliverance to enter the land.

They are still waiting for the Messiah at this point. They are still waiting for the coming One who would release them from the grasp of Rome and set up His kingdom and reign. So this is a nation waiting in anticipation for the coming Messiah.

I should mention as well, the Passover was a beautiful time within each family, led by the father. They would have a special meal, as they do today.

In that meal were several elements. One was a glass of salt water that reminded the family of the Red Sea through which God had brought them. There was a mixed paste that represented the bricks that they had to make without straw. There were several cups of red wine, representing the blood of the lamb, which

we know to be Jesus Christ, through which they had found deliverance.

One fascinating thing that I learned is that at each table in every Jewish home, there is an empty seat and a place set for Elijah. This is because they believe it will be the time of the Passover when Elijah will come and herald the news, "The Messiah is here." So every Jewish family, even the orthodox today, set that place and have that empty chair at the table in the hope that Elijah will come to their home and herald the announcement, "The Messiah has finally come."

Now there is one element in this special Passover meal that makes me glad I am not part of their feasting. For seven days, they eat unleavened bread. That is the stuff does not rise. I am pretty limited in my understanding of the way bread is made, but I understand that if you do not have leaven, it is rather flat. Is that right? I could not find it in the commentaries. Men wrote those things and they typically do not know this kind of stuff. However, I do know it is fairly tasteless. I have had some unleavened elements in communion and I do not think that is a way to celebrate!

I think of a celebration a little differently. This past Thursday night, two of our church evangelistic teams went out. We had a report session afterward and were rejoicing because the other team had the privilege of leading a husband and wife to Jesus Christ that night. I dropped off the two on my team at their homes and went to another meeting with a couple for several hours. In fact, I did not leave until nearly midnight as they are going through a very, very difficult time. The wife was an excellent hostess and as it was getting late in the evening, she asked, "Would you like a croissant and chocolate syrup?"

I looked at my watch and it was close to eleven o'clock. What would you have done? I mustered up all the courage I had and said, "Absolutely! I'd love it."

She made a kind of croissant and I am not even sure how to pronounce it, but I know how to pronounce chocolate! Some of you are going to gain a pound by just listening to me tell about this! I can eat like that and not gain one pound. Isn't that disgusting? In fact, the other night I sat down, around twelve o'clock, and ate half a jar of chocolate peanut clusters. I can eat any time and do not gain a pound. Some of you need to confess your sin of envy right now!

She brought a plate with this huge croissant and, over to the side, a swirling mound of thick chocolate

syrup and a knife to spread it. I was glad that fellow had some talking to do because I did not say a whole lot for the next fifteen minutes! Then, I left. That, to me, is a little bit closer to the idea of celebrating!

The Israelites would sit down to this tasteless meal. Why? Why did they have the unleavened bread? It was very significant. They were celebrating past deliverance, but they were also reminding themselves of the oppression of Egypt and, in that meal, they were, and are, looking forward to a banquet when the Messiah will reign. *That* is when the celebration is really going to break out in Jerusalem.

The declarations of Jesus (John 2)

Now, with that as a backdrop, turn to John, chapter 2. Look at verse 13.

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

This is fantastic. It is the time when the nation is awaiting the Messiah and Jesus decides to make His first appearance.

We are then told that He did three things. Let me give them to you.

1. First, Jesus asserted His authority over the temple.

Look at verse 14.

And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables.

Jesus starts to get angry and we are told in verse 15,

And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers, and overturned their tables;

Jesus then makes a statement that is a lot more than just a statement – He is declaring Himself to be the Messiah. Look at verse 16.

and to those who were selling the doves He said, “Take these things away; stop making My Father’s house a place of business.”

He is asserting His authority over the temple. In other words, He is saying, “This is My Father’s house and I am the rightful One to ‘call the shots’ in here.”

Now, just imagine that you live next door to me. Let us say that one morning you wake up to the sound

of a chain saw. You look out the kitchen window and see me in your back yard cutting down a tree. You would probably come rushing out and, in a dignified way, grab me by the nap of the neck and say, “What in the world are you doing?!”

I would explain, “Well, this tree is blocking my view of the sunrise from my deck.”

You would probably holler at me a little bit at that point. Why? I do not have the right to cut down a tree in your back yard. It is not my house; it is not my yard.

2. Secondly, Jesus displayed His power by the signs that He did.

Jesus was not doing this just to be cruel, He was asserting that the temple was *His* house. He was Lord over that temple.

What a stir He caused. In fact, they caught the picture pretty well. Look at another verse – Jesus had been doing something else and they had seen it. Look at verse 23.

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing.

The Bible does not tell us what He did. This is one of the things that John seems to indicate, “I just don’t have room to tell you everything that Jesus said and did.”

This verse tells us that Jesus was performing certain signs; He was doing certain miracles to substantiate His right, as the Son of the Father, to spiritually lead the nation. So, secondly, He was displaying His divine power.

3. Thirdly, Jesus articulated the central evidence of the gospel.

Look at verse 19.

Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

Now I just explained to you a little of what the temple looked like. It had a white stone that had taken years to carve from the mountain, and it had gold, and all of that. Then, this Man says, “In three days I will build it again.”

Jesus was giving them the significant element of His right. That was *this* temple, John will explain in the chapter – *this* temple will be raised again. Jesus’ right to be their Messiah; His right to be their leader is

that He has power over death – He will live again and forever.

So, Jesus is presented as a Messiah, and when you understand that, then with that in your mind and in the background, all of a sudden, John, chapter 3, takes on new meaning. Due to lack of time, we will only briefly look at this.

Jesus now presents the fact that He is not only the Messiah, but He is the Lamb that they are celebrating during Passover. He reveals this to a Sanhedrin who sneaks over to talk to Him. The Sanhedrin says, “I saw what you did in the temple. That’s quite a claim.”

Jesus said to him, in verse 16,

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Jesus is still presenting Himself as the Messiah.

Feast of Tabernacles

Now, let us leave the Feast of Passover and discuss one more. Leviticus, chapter 23, from verse 34 to the end of the chapter, tells us of the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths. Keep your finger in John because we are going back to it.

Three basic elements

There were three basic elements in this feast.

1. The first was to remember Israel’s past.

Look at verse 43.

so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

In this feast, and this was rather unique, the people were supposed to go out, cut some limbs off of living trees, and make small booths. A lot of the people built them on their flat roofs or beside their homes.

What were they doing? They were going back, in their minds, to the day when they lived in shacks in Egypt.

It did not matter whether you were a wealthy Jew or a poor Jew, you built your little booth. And in that booth, you would eat, sleep, pray, meditate, study, talk.

I thought, “Wouldn’t that be something?! Here’s a Jew who lives in wealth in Jerusalem – with servants and every need met – but once a year, goes out and builds a little wooden shack and sleeps in it to remind himself of where he had come from.”

I am going to diverge briefly to apply this thought to us. We are so blessed that we forget how blessed we are. Do you know why? Because we do not have a time each year that we stop to remember where we have come from. It would be good for all of us to live in a little wooden shack for a few days, wouldn’t it?

2. This feast also represented Israel’s present.

Look at verse 39.

. . . when you have gathered in the crops of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the Lord . . .

This was a national thanksgiving.

3. Thirdly, it represented Israel’s future.

They would also sacrifice seventy bulls. This is where it gets exciting. Why do they sacrifice seventy bulls? That represented, to their mind, the seventy Gentile nations. They would say, “When our Messiah comes, He will not only reign over us, but He will reign over the whole world.” All of us who are Gentiles got sneaked into this festival in terms of the sacrificing of these seventy bulls.

Two distinguishing features

Now, there were two distinguishing features of this feast; two elements that were very significant.

1. The first was a water libation and a wine libation.

I talked about the temple, but forgot to mention something about the altar. On the southeastern corner of the altar were two receptacles made of solid silver. During this feast, the priest would take water and also wine and pour it into the receptacles. This was a mixed drink that represented Gentiles – a mixed people. The water and wine would flow together and then, down into a funnel that would be conducted and emptied over the Valley of Kidron.

Now, let me take you to John again. Turn to John, chapter 7. We know, from the text, that this is the Festival of Booths or the Festival of Tabernacles.

The last day of this Feast of Tabernacles was a great day. This is another time that the Jews are

celebrating. Look at verse 11 of chapter 7, which tells us what happened on this day.

So the Jews therefore were seeking Him at the feast and were saying, "Where is He?"

This must have rubbed those priests raw . They are celebrating this feast, with all the pomp and circumstance, and for years, the nations have celebrated this without any other thought. However, on *this* day, the main topic of conversation among those three million Jews was, "Where's Jesus?"

That is like trying to preach on Super Bowl Sunday – everyone's mind is somewhere else. They are trying to go through this ceremony and they are asking the question, "Where's Jesus?"

Look at verse 37a.

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, . . .

Now, there is a climatic celebration on the last day of this feast. The Bible says in this verse, it is "the great day". The great day was called the "Great Hosanna". It was a song, the "Great Hallel," that came from the Psalms, and the people would sing in unison, "O God, save us now."

They would do something rather interesting on this great day. They would come into the temple with two things.

- The first would be a piece of citrus fruit in their hand. That would represent the goodness of God.
- The second, which they would carry in their other hand, would be a lulov. A lulov is a mixture of several kinds of branches – palm, myrtle, and willow – tied together with a golden string. When they sang "O God, save us now," they would wave their lulovs at the altar, as if to remind God of His covenant and promise that a Messiah would come.

This is another study in itself, but the second item is the reason it is so significant when later, the Israelites wave their palm branches at Jesus Christ. Do you remember what they were saying? "Hosanna," which is translated, "Save us now, Son of David." The people had recognized that Jesus was who He said He was.

On this climatic day, the people would be there and the priest would do something very interesting. With an entourage of people, he would walk to the accompaniment of music to the pool of Siloam – a

sacred place that represented the goodness and grace of God. He would have a golden vessel and would bend down and scoop up water from the pool. He would take that vessel and walk back, in step with these people, singing. The priest, standing on the wall of the temple, would trumpet his appearance at the water gate, that he was now here, and he would be met by another priest, who would be carrying a wine libation, representing the Gentiles. Then, these two men, side by side, would walk up the ramp to the altar and would pour their libations into the receptacles.

This was the climatic event of the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths. They would pour out the water, representing the grace of God, and say, "God, You promised us a Messiah." They would pour out the wine and say, "You promised a Messiah that would rule the world."

Now, look at John, chapter 7, verses 37 and 38.

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'"

Now, Zechariah prophesied that the Messiah would come and He would bring living water to Jerusalem. So what is Jesus doing? Is He just coming up with a catchy phrase? No. He was standing in the temple as they poured the water, and He was saying, "I am the living water. You come to Me. And I, your Messiah, will rule the world."

2. Now, there was a second distinguishing element in this feast and this gets even better. Not only was their water, but the second element was light.

The court of women, also known as the treasury, was where the money was kept. I think it is appropriate that they kept the money in the court of women and that is all I am going to say about that! The men came to the court of women to put their offerings in a receptacle. I am not teasing – this is the truth! The men would come to the court of women and it was called the treasury.

Jesus, as recorded in John, chapter 8, verse 20, was teaching. Where was He teaching? Look at that verse.

These words He [Jesus] spoke in the treasury . . .

Jesus was teaching in the treasury soon after this feast.

Now, in that court of women, there were large; in fact, huge candelabra. The candelabra were not holding candles, but receptacles – twelve of them. The young priests would run joyfully, as they climbed up the ladders to the top, and would pour oil into these receptacles and light the cloth wicks.

Josephus tells us that when they lit those twelve wicks, it seemed, from a distance, as if the temple were on fire with light.

Now, in the court of women with those twelve receptacles bathing the air with brilliant light, Jesus Christ said, in verse 12 of John, chapter 8,

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”

What is Jesus doing? He is saying, on these feast days, “I *am* the Messiah. I am the rightful One to rule, if you will only hear and obey.”

Right after that, in chapter 9 of John, what does Jesus do? He goes out, after making the declaration that if they follow Him, they will not walk in darkness, and He heals someone. Who does He heal? He heals a blind man. However, He does not heal him with just the snap of His finger, He puts mud on his eyes and tells him to go and wash where? In the pool of Siloam.

I told you it would get interesting, but we must close. What is Jesus doing? He is telling the people, “That which represents, in figure, the grace of God, I, being the rightful One, can turn that figure into reality so that you are never blinded again by the darkness of the Law; the darkness of this system. You come to Me and you will see.”