עֵץ הַיִים

ETZ HAYIM
TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

Produced by THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY

Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary
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must, to be acceptable, be without blemish; there must be no defect in it. 22 Anything blind, or injured, or maimed, or with a wen, boil-scar, or scurvy—such you shall not offer to the Lord; you shall not put any of them on the altar as gifts to the Lord. 23 You may, however, present as a freewill offering an ox or a sheep with a limb extended or contracted; but it will not be accepted for a vow. 24 You shall not offer to the Lord anything [with its testes] bruised or crushed or torn or cut. You shall have no such practices in your own land, 25 nor shall you accept such [animals] from a foreigner for offering as food for your God, for they are mutilated, they have a defect; they shall not be accepted in your favor.

26 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 27 When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall stay seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be acceptable as a gift to the Lord. 28 However, no animal from the herd or from the flock shall be slaughtered on the same day with its young. 29 When you sacrifice a thanksgiving offering to the Lord, sacrifice it so that it may be acceptable in your favor. 30 It shall be eaten on the same day; you shall not leave any of it until morning: I am the Lord.

31 You shall faithfully observe My command-

22. There is a marked similarity between the physical defects that render a priest unfit to officiate and those that render an animal unfit for sacrifice.

23. freewill offering Because this offering is a gift to the sanctuary and is not intended for sacrifice, it need not be perfect.

27–28. Maimonides writes, “There is no distinction between the suffering of a human being and that of a beast in this respect, since feelings of maternal affection belong not to the intellectual faculty but to the emotional faculty, which is common to humans and animals alike.” Recent research seems to indicate that animals do indeed have such feelings. Other scholars claim that the primary concern of the law is not with the animal’s feelings but with the cultivation of kindness and compassion in the heart of the human being. “It is not because God pities the animal but in order that the people of Israel should not practice cruel habits” (B’khor Shor).
ments: I am the Lord. You shall not profane My holy name, that I may be sanctified in the midst of the Israelite people—I the Lord who sanctify you, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God, I the Lord.

23 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Speak to the Israelite people and say to them:

These are My fixed times, the fixed times of the Lord, which you shall proclaim as sacred occasions.

On six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there shall be a sabbath of complete rest.

THE CALENDAR OF SACRED TIME (23:1–44)

Chapter 23 presents a calendar of the annual festivals celebrated in biblical times.

SHABBAT (vv. 1–3)

2. Speak to the Israelite people which you shall proclaim as sacred occasions

Although the dates of the festivals and the regularity of Shabbat were set by God, the Israelites also must proclaim them as sacred.

3. On six days work may be done

This statement emphasizes three norms of conduct basic to the observance of Shabbat: (a) the prohibition of melakhah (work), (b) the sanctity of Shabbat, and (c) the requirement that Shabbat be observed in all Israelite settlements.

sabbath of complete rest Hebrew: shabbat

32. in the midst of the Israelite people

The public performance of a mitzvah not only benefits the one who does it but has an effect on those who see it, even as a violation of the Torah in public is more damaging than similar behavior done privately (Hoffman). This lead the Sages to view the sanctifying of God's name (Kiddush ha-Shem) as essentially a public act. Thus, for example, a minyan is required for recitation of the mourner’s Kaddish and for other prayers proclaiming God's holiness. The faith of the congregation is strengthened when a newly bereaved man or woman, who might have reason to feel angry with God, stands up in its midst to praise God. The Talmud states that there is no greater achievement for a Jew than acting in a way that causes people to think less of Israel's God and Israel's laws (BT Yoma 86a). The term Kiddush ha-Shem, sanctifying God's name in public, is often linked to, but not limited to, acts of martyrdom.

CHAPTER 23

2. The festivals of the Jewish year are listed first in Exod. 34. The list is repeated here to set out the special role and responsibilities of the kohanim, again in Num. 28–29 to present the special offerings brought on each festive occasion, and once more in Deut. 16 to emphasize the obligation of pilgrimage to the central shrine. The Israelites find the presence of God in the sanctuary, which represents the permanent holiness of sacred space, and on the festivals, which represent the recurring holiness of sacred time.

HALAKKHAH L'MA-ASEH

23:3. do no work The Hebrew word melakhah (work) signifies any creative endeavor. One should refrain not only from paid labor but also from many actions that today may be considered leisure activities, such as gardening, cooking, sewing, arts and crafts, building, and writing.
rest, a sacred occasion. You shall do no work; it shall be a sabbath of the Lord throughout your settlements.

4 These are the set times of the Lord, the sacred occasions, which you shall celebrate each at its appointed time: 5 in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, there shall be a passover offering to the Lord, and on the fifteenth day of that month the Lord’s Feast of Unleavened Bread. You shall eat unleavened bread for seven days. 7 On the first day you shall celebrate a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations. 8 Seven days you shall make gifts to the Lord. The seventh day shall be a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations.

9 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 10 Speak to the Israelite people and say to them:

shabbaton; literally, “the most restful cessation” from assigned tasks. The word shabbat means “to desist, cease, be idle.”

sabbath of the Lord A day that belongs to God.

FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD (vv. 4–8) 4. Each festival is to occur at the same time every year.

5. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month This is the dating system that was in use during much of the biblical period. The unit of time was the lunar month (hodesh), not the week; and the months of the year were designated by ordinal numbers: the first month, the second month, and so forth. The counting of months began in the spring.

twilight The period of time between sunset and nightfall, approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes in duration.

passover offering Here the term “pesah” refers to the sacrifice, not to the festival (see Exod. 12:6).

7. On the first and seventh (or last) days of the festival, work is forbidden. The community celebrates together. During the intervening days, necessary normal work may be done, but the celebration continues.

NEW GRAIN CROP (vv. 9–14)

New grain is to be regarded as belonging to God and may not be eaten until certain offerings are taken from it and presented before God. Those offerings remove the sanctity from the crop, thereby releasing the remainder for ordinary human use.

7. you shall not work at your occupations The Jewish festivals challenge us: Do we define ourselves primarily by our work? Or do we define ourselves primarily by our total humanity, our ability to celebrate, to sanctify time, to share special moments with our families?
When you enter the land that I am giving to you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the first sheaf of your harvest to the priest. 11 He shall elevate the sheaf before the L ORD for acceptance in your behalf; the priest shall elevate it on the day after the sabbath. 12 On the day that you elevate the sheaf, you shall offer as a burnt offering to the L ORD a lamb of the first year without blemish. 13 The grain offering with it shall be two-tenths of a measure of choice flour with oil mixed in, a gift of pleasing odor to the L ORD; and the libation with it shall be of wine, a quarter of a hin. 14 Until that very day, until you have brought the offering of your God, you shall eat no bread or parched grain or fresh ears; it is a law for all time throughout the ages in all your settlements.

15 And from the day on which you bring the sheaf of elevation offering—the day after the sabbath—you shall count seven weeks. They must be complete: 16 you must count until the day after the seventh week—fifty days; then you shall bring an offering of new grain to the L ORD.

17 You shall bring from your settlements two

10. sheaf  Hebrew: omer, a bundle of stalks bound together after reaping. Here, the reference is to barley, the first grain to ripen in the spring.

to the priest  The particular priest who officiates at the rite in the sanctuary.

11. The purpose of such rites was to “show” the offering to God, so that it might be accepted.

12–13. The burnt offering (olah) was often accompanied by a grain offering (minhab) and a libation (nesekh), as prescribed here. The measure of grain required here is twice the usual amount, to emphasize the importance of grain in this celebration.

14. Until God receives a share of the new grain crop, none of it may be used by humans.

SHAVU•OT FESTIVAL (vv. 15–22)

17. No leaven could be brought up on the
loaves of bread as an elevation offering; each shall be made of two-tenths of a measure of choice flour, baked after leavening, as first fruits to the Lord. \(^ {18} \)With the bread you shall present, as burnt offerings to the Lord, seven yearling lambs without blemish, one bull of the herd, and two rams, with their grain offerings and libations, a gift of pleasing odor to the Lord. \(^ {19} \)You shall also offer one he-goat as a purification offering and two yearling lambs as a sacrifice of well-being. \(^ {20} \)The priest shall elevate these—the two lambs—together with the bread of first fruits as an elevation offering before the Lord; they shall be holy to the Lord, for the priest. \(^ {21} \)On that same day you shall hold a celebration; it shall be a sacred occasion for you; you shall not work at your occupations. This is a law for all time in all your settlements, throughout the ages.

And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the Lord am your God.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: \(^ {24} \)Speak to the Israelite people thus: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, when you bring the sheaf of the first fruits of your land to the altar, you shall present a burnt offering to the Lord: a bull, two rams, and seven yearling lambs as a sacrifice of well-being. \(^ {25} \)And you shall offer one goat as a purification offering and two yearling lambs as a sacrifice of well-being. \(^ {26} \)The priest shall elevate these—the two lambs—together with the bread of first fruits as an elevation offering before the Lord; they shall be holy to the Lord, for the priest. In the first instance, these offerings are the Lord’s, who, in turn, commands that they be allotted to the priests.

FIRST DAY OF THE SEVENTH MONTH (vv. 23–25)

This section ordains the celebration of three major sacred occasions occurring during the seventh month: (a) the first day of the seventh month (which in the later tradition became the Jewish New Year), (b) the Day of Atonement, and (c) the Sukkot festival.

22. Why are the gleanings of the harvest mentioned here, interrupting the list of festivals? Perhaps because they were gathered at the Shavu•ot harvest season, as we read in the Book of Ruth, or because, as the Sifra suggests, when one shares one’s bounty with the poor, it is as if it were offered on God’s altar.

24. The Torah never refers to the first day of the seventh month as Rosh ha-Shanah. That term first appears in Ezek. 40:1. In the Torah,
month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe complete rest, a sacred occasion commemorated with loud blasts. 25You shall not work at your occupations; and you shall bring a gift to the Lord.

26The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 27Mark, the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be a sacred occasion for you: you shall practice self-denial, and you shall bring a gift to the Lord; 28you shall do no work throughout that day. For it is a Day of Atonement, on which expiation is made on your behalf before the Lord your God. 29Indeed, any person who does not practice self-denial throughout that day shall be cut off from his kin; 30and whoever does any work throughout that day, I will cause that person to perish from among his people. 31Do no work whatever; it is a law for all time, throughout the ages in all your settlements. 32It shall be a sabbath of complete rest for you, and you shall practice self-denial; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall observe this your sabbath.

Atonement. The Hebrew term zikron t’ru•ah means, literally, “commemoration by blasting” the shofar.

DAY OF ATONEMENT (vv. 26–32)
See Comments to 16:29–34.

it is called “a day of remembrance” or “a day of sounding the shofar.” Readers may be surprised to learn that Rosh ha-Shanah begins the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar rather than the first. It commemorates the creation of the world, which traditionally is believed to have happened in the fall, the beginning of the new agricultural cycle. But the people Israel date their calendar from the Exodus, which happened in the spring (cf. Exod. 12:2, designating the month of the Exodus as the first month of Israel’s calendar).

32. from evening to evening, you shall observe this This verse has been interpreted as setting the norm for every festival in the Jewish religious calendar, namely, that the celebration

27. you shall practice self-denial That is, you shall fast.

32. on the ninth day…at evening The Yom Kippur fast does not start until the evening (after sunset, at night) after the ninth day. “Eating and drinking responsibly on the day before and the day after Yom Kippur are as much of a mitzvah as fasting on Yom Kippur” (BT Yoma 81b).
The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Say to the Israelite people:

On the fifteenth day of this seventh month there shall be the Feast of Booths to the Lord, [to last] seven days. The first day shall be a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations; seven days you shall bring gifts to the Lord. On the eighth day you shall observe a sacred occasion and bring a gift to the Lord; it is a solemn gathering: you shall not work at your occupations.

Those are the set times of the Lord that you shall celebrate as sacred occasions, bringing gifts to the Lord—burnt offerings, grain offerings, sacrifices, and libations, on each day what is proper to it—apart from the sabbaths of the Lord, and apart from your gifts and from all your votive offerings and from all your freewill offerings that you give to the Lord.

Mark, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the yield of your land, you shall observe the festival of the Lord [to last] seven days: a complete rest on the harvest in the autumn to last through the winter months, even as animals store food for the winter, the Israelites are urged to store up the feelings of gratitude and dependence that mark the holiday season—to last them through the months that will follow, months without festival days. (In the biblical period, Hanukkah did not exist. It celebrates events that took place after the time of the Torah.)

SUKKOT FESTIVAL (vv. 33–44)

34. the Feast of Booths The Hebrew word sukkah, “booth,” derives from the verb kaph, “to cover over,” as with branches. It designates a small, usually temporary, structure that is covered on top and only partially enclosed on its sides.

35. first day Why is it called the “first day” when it is actually the fifteenth of the month? After the slate has been wiped clean on Yom Kippur, we begin our relationship with God anew on Sukkot (Lev. R. 30:7).

36. solemn gathering This term derives from the Hebrew verb atzeret, “to detain, restrain, confine,” and may refer to the fact that the people are kept together for an additional day.
the first day, and a complete rest on the eighth day. On the first day you shall take the product of hadar trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. You shall observe it as a festival of the Lord for seven days in the year; you shall observe it in the seventh month as a law for all time, throughout the ages. You shall live in booths seven days; all citizens in Israel shall live in booths, in order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I the Lord your God.

So Moses declared to the Israelites the set times of the Lord.

40.

hadar trees

 Literally, “beautiful trees.” They symbolize the abundance of water and oases and the beauty of the land of Israel. In horticulture, there are no particular trees designated as hadar. Traditionally, the “product of hadar trees” has been taken to be the citron (etrog).

you shall rejoice

Rejoicing is explicitly commanded in this chapter only for the celebration of Sukkot. The pressing of the grapes had been completed, and there was no labor to be done until the beginning of the next agricultural cycle. The people had leisure time as well as ample food and wine with which to rejoice.

43.

I made the Israelite people live in booths

According to Exod. 12:37, Sukkot (literally, Booths) is the name of the first stop on the Exodus route from Egypt.

44. The Midrash offers many interpretations of the symbolic meaning of the four species of Sukkot. The lulav (palm branch) represents the spine—erect but not rigid; the myrtle, the eyes; the willow, the lips; and the etrog, the heart. They summon us to use all of our limbs and organs to rejoice before the Lord. Yet another midrash compares the etrog, which tastes and smells good, to people who possess learning and also do good deeds; the lulav, which has taste but no fragrance, to people who have learning but do not do good; the myrtle, which has fragrance but no taste, to people who do good but lack learning; and the willow, with neither taste nor fragrance, to people who lack both learning and good deeds but who are still to be counted as members of the community in order for the community to be complete (Lev. R. 30:10–12).
you shall observe a sacred occasion when you shall practice self-denial. You shall do no work. You shall present to the LORD a burnt offering of pleasing odor: one bull of the herd, one ram, seven yearling lambs; see that they are without blemish. The grain offering with them—of choice flour with oil mixed in—shall be: three-tenths of a measure for a bull, two-tenths for the one ram, one-tenth for each of the seven lambs. And there shall be one goat for a purification offering, in addition to the purification offering of expiation and the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, each with its libation.

12 On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, you shall observe a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations.—Seven days you shall observe a festival of the LORD.—You shall present a burnt offering, a gift of pleasing odor to the LORD: Thirteen bulls of the herd, two rams, fourteen yearling lambs; they shall be without blemish. The grain offerings with them—of choice flour with oil mixed in—shall be: three-tenths of a measure for each of the thirteen bulls, two-tenths for each of the two rams, and one-tenth for each of the fourteen lambs. And there shall be one goat for a purification offering—in addition to the regular burnt offering, its grain offering and libation.

and performed exclusively by the high priest (Lev. 16).

7. you shall practice self-denial Literally, “you shall afflict yourselves,” chiefly by fasting. You shall do no work Literally, “you shall not do any work.” The same phrase is used for Shabbat (Lev. 23:3). It indicates a more severe prohibition of work on these days than on the other festivals.

THE 15th TO THE 21st OF THE SEVENTH MONTH (vv. 12–34)

This sacred occasion is called “the Feast of Booths” (Hag ha-Sukkot) in Lev. 23:34 and Deut.

CHAPTER 29

13. Offerings for the week of Sukkot are staggering in number, a total of 98 lambs and 70 bullocks. (Pesah week requires only 16 bulls; no other holiday requires more than 2.) The Talmud teaches that the 70 bulls represent thanksgiving offerings on behalf of the 70 nations of the world (BT Suk. 55b). In case some nations forget to be grateful to God, Israel brings a bullock offering (the most extravagant of the sacrifices) on their behalf on Sukkot, the festival of thanksgiving. One of Israel’s tasks in the world is to remind other nations to be grateful to God.

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The events described in this haftarah represent a total transformation of sacred life in ancient Israel and the public documentation of its legitimacy. Transference of the ancient holy objects from the temporary tabernacle to the permanent shrine of the Temple formally closes the period of wilderness wandering. It also concludes the transitional phase that King David inaugurated; for in his day, the Ark rested in various locales, including the city of David (Zion). It now finds its permanent home in the grand Temple of Jerusalem. Solomon, to link his actions with ancient authority, presents himself as the very son predicted in 2 Sam. 7:12–13 to realize David’s cultic desire. With the transfer of the sacred objects to a new site and the proclamation of the king’s divine right, God’s word to David is now fulfilled.

Two events stand behind the depiction of Solomon’s ceremony here, and add an aura of completion to the new moment. The first event is the processional. In the account of the Ark’s transfer from Zion, with Solomon’s participation in the accompanying sacrifices, the attentive reader can hardly miss an echo of David’s participation in the events that first brought the Ark to the city of David (2 Sam. 6:12–19). The other event takes us back to an earlier time, when the Ark was constructed in the days of Moses. When that work was done, “the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the Presence of the Lord filled the Tabernacle” (Exod. 40:34). This was the sign that the Lord had accepted the work of human hands as a place fit for His dwelling. The haftarah alludes to this occasion by stating that when the Ark was deposited in the Holy of Holies “the cloud . . . filled the House of the Lord . . . for the Presence of the Lord filled the House of the Lord” (1 Kings 8:10–11). The wilderness tabernacle and the Jerusalem temple are thus clearly linked. Implicitly, Solomon is deemed the true heir of Moses as well as David. To underscore this point, the text notes that Solomon’s shrine housed the “two tablets of stone” hewn by Moses on Mount Sinai (v. 9).

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE CALENDAR

The image of the cloud in the shrine (1 Kings 8:10–11) is a sign of God’s abundant presence. It draws on old themes of providential guidance, recalling the cloud and the fire that attended the Israelites in the wilderness by day and by night. But it also integrates that image of nomadic movement with another figure of divine presence and protection. In that figure, God’s Presence in the shrine overarches the city as a sukkah, providing shade and shelter for all (Isa. 4:5–6). Thus the imagery of divine indwelling in Solomon’s shrine is raised to a new level, giving the blessing of God’s permanent presence on earth.

“The Lord has chosen / To abide in a thick cloud” (1 Kings 8:12). This image of hope is the theological counterpoint to words of lamentation, uttered from the depths of despair: “You [God] have clothed Yourself [sakkota] in anger and pursued us, / You have slain without pity. / You have screened Yourself off [sakkota] with a cloud [anan], / That no prayer may pass through. / You have made us filth and refuse / In the midst of the peoples” (Lam. 3:43–45). Ancient motifs and language have been inverted here, conveying the horror of divine fury and absence. Jewish history has inherited these two biblical images of God’s presence and withdrawal, and has lived them.
8 All the men of Israel gathered before King Solomon at the Feast, in the month of Ethanim—that is, the seventh month. When all the elders of Israel had come, the priests lifted the Ark and carried up the Ark of the LORD. Then the priests and the Levites brought the Tent of Meeting and all the holy vessels that were in the Tent. Meanwhile, King Solomon and the whole community of Israel, who were assembled with him before the Ark, were sacrificing sheep and oxen in such abundance that they could not be numbered or counted.

6 The priests brought the Ark of the LORD’s Covenant to its place underneath the wings of the cherubim, in the Shrine of the House, in the Holy of Holies; for the cherubim had their wings spread out over the place of the Ark, so that the cherubim shielded the Ark and its poles from above. The poles projected so that the ends of the poles were visible in the sanctuary in front of the Shrine, but they could not be seen outside; and there they remain to this day. There was nothing inside the Ark but the two tablets of stone which Moses placed there at Horeb, when the LORD made [a covenant] with the Israelites after their departure from the land of Egypt.

10 When the priests came out of the sanctuary—for the cloud had filled the House of the LORD and the priests were not able to remain and perform the service because of the cloud, for the Presence of the LORD filled the House of the LORD—then Solomon declared:
“The Lord has chosen
To abide in a thick cloud:
13I have now built for You
A stately House,
A place where You
May dwell forever.”
14Then, with the whole congregation of Israel standing, the king faced about and blessed the whole congregation of Israel. 15He said:

“Praised be the Lord, the God of Israel, who has fulfilled with deeds the promise He made to my father David. For He said, 16‘Ever since I brought My people Israel out of Egypt, I have not chosen a city among all the tribes of Israel for building a House where My name might abide; but I have chosen David to rule My people Israel.’

17“Now my father David had intended to build a House for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. 18But the Lord said to my father David, ‘As regards your intention to build a House for My name, you did right to have that intention. 19However, you shall not build the House yourself; instead, your son, the issue of your loins, shall build the House for My name.’

20“And the Lord has fulfilled the promise that He made: I have succeeded my father David and have ascended the throne of Israel, as the Lord promised. I have built the House for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel; 21and I have set a place there for the Ark, containing the covenant which the Lord made with our fathers when He brought them out from the land of Egypt.”

18. the Lord said to . . . David Through the prophet Nathan (2 Sam. 7:8–17).