you may not eat: the eagle, the vulture, and the black vulture; 13 the kite, the falcon, and the buzzard of any variety; 14 every variety of raven; 15 the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull, and the hawk of any variety; 16 the little owl, the great owl, and the white owl; 17 the pelican, the bustard, and the cormorant; 18 the stork, any variety of heron, the hoopoe, and the bat.

19 All winged swarming things are impure for you: they may not be eaten. 20 You may eat only pure winged creatures.

21 You shall not eat anything that has died a natural death; give it to the stranger in your community to eat, or you may sell it to a foreigner. For you are a people consecrated to the Lord your God. You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk.

22 You shall set aside every year a tenth part of all the yield of your sowing that is brought in.

distinguished by easily observable external characteristics. Hence, no general rule is given for distinguishing among them, but only a list identifying those that are impure.

12. Virtually all the forbidden winged creatures are scavengers or birds of prey. They share four characteristics: they lack a crop (the pouched enlargement of the gullet that stores food), they lack an extra toe on the back of the foot, the sac in their gizzards cannot be peeled off, and they tear their prey. Note that the identification of several of the birds is not certain.

eagle Hebrew: nesher, which can refer also to a griffon vulture.

19. swarming things Hebrew: sheretz, creatures that swarm or crawl—such as insects, rodents, reptiles, and ambulatory marine animals.


21. died a natural death It was not torn by another creature.

give it to the stranger . . . sell it to a foreigner Deuteronomy, unlike Lev. 17:15, does not mandate that “strangers” (i.e., resident aliens) must avoid impurity, because they are not subject to the requirements of holiness that are incumbent on Israelites. Hence they may eat the flesh of animals that die of natural causes. The distinction between “giving” the meat to resident aliens and “selling” it to foreigners reflects the differing economic status of the two classes. Resident aliens were often poor and objects of charity. Nonresident foreigners normally were in the land for purposes of trade and were able to support themselves.

You shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk

This rule is listed with the food prohibitions because meat cooked this way may not be eaten (see Exod. 23:19, 34:26). Meat boiled in sour milk (leben) was probably regarded as a delicacy, as it is by Arabs. The prohibition is similar to the rule against slaughtering cattle and their young on the same day and the requirement that newborn cattle remain with their mothers at least one week before they are sacrificed, to prevent acts of insensitivity against animals.

PERIODIC DUTIES (14:22–16:17)

TITHES (vv. 22–29)
The farmer must set aside a tithe of his produce each year. Tithing was a well-known practice in
from the field. You shall consume the tithes of your new grain and wine and oil, and the firstlings of your herds and flocks, in the presence of the Lord your God, in the place where He will choose to establish His name, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God forever. Should the distance be too great for you, should you be unable to transport them, because the place where the Lord your God has chosen to establish His name is far from you, you may convert them into money. Wrap up the money and take it with you to the place that your God has chosen, and spend the money and take it with you to the place that your God has blessed you, you may convert them into money. Wrap up the money and take it with you to the place where the Lord your God will choose to establish His name, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God forever.

24. because the place...is far from you

Reverence will be fostered in the chosen city by the course of worship at the chosen sanctuary. Because this was the blessing of abundant crops, the tithe would be too ample for transport over a long distance.

25. money

Money consisted of precious metal, most often silver. The metal was shaped into rings, bracelets, and ingots, the value of which was established by their weight at the time of each transaction.

wrap up the money

Keep it intact in a money bag, spending none of it along the way.

26. wine, or other intoxicant

This phrase refers either to different types of grape wine, such as new and old or mixed and unmixed, or to grape wine and another intoxicant, such as date wine, pomegranate wine, or beer.

anything you may desire

To eat as part of the feast.
of the Lord your God, and rejoice with your household.

27 But do not neglect the Levite in your community, for he has no hereditary portion as you have. 28 Every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your yield of that year, but leave it within your settlements. 29 Then the Levite, who has no hereditary portion as you have, and the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your settlements shall come and eat their fill, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the enterprises you undertake.

15 Every seventh year you shall practice re-

rejoice with your household A farmer and his household could not possibly consume the entire tithe during the required 9 days of pilgrimage to the sanctuary each year (16:1–17). Theoretically, a household producing at subsistence level would require 35.4 days to consume 10 percent (a tithe) of its produce. Even if the farmers invited the Levites and the poor to the festival meals, as required, and doubled their normal consumption, they still could not dispose of all the food—unless there were as many Levites and poor as there were members of the farmers’ households, which is unlikely. Perhaps whatever was left over had to be given away to the poor or was destroyed.

27. Levite in your community Those residing in the various towns and cities.

The Triennial Poor Tithe (vv. 28–29)
In the third and sixth years of each seven-year cycle (see 15:1), the farmers shall not eat the tithe at the sanctuary but must deposit it in their hometowns to feed the Levites and the poor. Presumably, the produce collected in each of these two years was expected to suffice for three or four years until the next collection. It seems unlikely that the poor were to be fed only two years out of seven.

28. bring out full tithe None of it is to be diverted to any other use.

leave it within your settlements Public storage facilities and threshing floors near the city gate would have been natural locations for the deposit, distribution, and long-term stockpiling of the produce.

29. the fatherless, and the widow That is, the poor.
come and eat their fill The recipients of the tithe would be given food daily as needed.

so that the Lord . . . may bless you Such assurances are given with laws that require economic sacrifice for the sake of the poor. Because the Israelite might fear that these sacrifices would cause economic hardship, the donor is assured that, in the end, they will lead to prosperity.

MEASURES TO PROTECT THE POOR (15:1–18)
This section deals with extreme difficulties that can befall the poor: inability to obtain loans, inability to pay off debts, and indentured servitude. Some of these laws are also found elsewhere in the Torah and in other ancient Near Eastern societies.

CHAPTER 15

1. Most of this chapter is concerned with ensuring that there not emerge in Israel a permanent underclass—persons unable to lift themselves out of poverty. Such a condition would be unfair to human beings, fashioned in God’s image, and dangerous to society as a breeding ground for lawlessness and irresponsibility. The first step in the direction of preventing that is the remission of debts in the seventh year.
mission of debts. 2 This shall be the nature of the remission: every creditor shall remit the due that he claims from his fellow; he shall not dun his fellow or kinsman, for the remission proclaimed is of the Lord. 3 You may dun the foreigner; but you must remit whatever is due you from your kinsmen.

4 There shall be no needy among you—since the Lord your God will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a hereditary portion—5 if only you heed the Lord your God and take care to keep all this Instruction that I enjoin upon you this day. 6 For the Lord your God will bless you as He has promised you: you will extend loans to many nations, but require none yourself; you will dominate many nations, but they will not dominate you.

7 If, however, there is a needy person among

Remission of Debts  (vv. 1–6)

The Torah is here concerned with the type of debt incurred by the poor and insolvent: a farmer in dire need of funds because of crop failure and a city dweller destitute as a result of unemployment. Loans to such individuals were regarded as acts of philanthropy rather than commercial ventures, and the forgiving of such loans was an extension of the generosity. The remission of debts and other provisions for the relief of debtors are part of the Torah’s program for preserving a balanced distribution of resources across society (see Exod. 22:24–26; Lev. 25:36–37; Deut. 23:20–21, 24:6,10–13,17).

1. Every seventh year  According to talmudic law, debts were canceled at sunset on the last day of the seventh year.


2. every creditor  Because the remission is for the benefit of the poor, it probably does not cover all types of debts. (According to later Jewish law, unpaid wages, bills owed to shopkeepers for merchandise, and certain types of secured loans are not canceled.)

   his fellow or his kinsman  That is, “his fellow, who is his kinsman.” Both terms refer to one person.

   for the remission proclaimed is of the Lord

This seems to be the equivalent of the formula in Mesopotamian decrees explaining that debts may not be collected “because the king has established a remission for the land.” In the Torah it is God—Israel’s divine king—who establishes the remission.

3. The remission applies only to debts owed by fellow Israelites, not by foreigners. Similarly, the remission edict of the Babylonian king Ammitisaduka canceled only the debts of kinsmen: Akkadians and Amorites in Babylon. Collecting debts is a legitimate right, and forgiving debts is an extraordinary sacrifice that members of society are willing to forgo only on behalf of those who have a special family-like claim on their compassion.

4. your God will bless you  With prosperity.

6. as He has promised you  The promises are linked to the Israelites’ obedience.

   you will extend loans  If the Israelites will obey God’s laws, not only will they have no poor who need loans but they will be so prosperous that other nations will turn to them for loans.

   you will dominate  Economically.

Lend to the Poor!  (vv. 7–11)

Even those who normally would be willing to lend to the poor might hesitate as the year of remission approaches, because it is likely that they would lose what they had loaned. Moses urges the people to disregard such calculations. Such appeals for
DEUTERONOMY 15:8  reih

you, one of your kinsmen in any of your settlements in the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsman. 8 Rather, you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs. 9 Beware lest you harbor the base thought, “The seventh year, the year of remission, is approaching,” so that you are mean to your needy kinsman and give him nothing. He will cry out to the Lord against you, and you will incur guilt. 10 Give to him readily and have no regrets when you do so, for in return the Lord your God will bless you in all your efforts and in all your undertakings.

11 For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: open your hand to the poor and needy kinsman in your land.

compassion are characteristic of Deuteronomy (see v. 18).

7. If . . . there is a needy person among you
If the ideal promised in verse 4 is not achieved.

9. you will incur guilt
Guilt builds up until it leads to punishment, just as merit builds up and leads to reward.

10. God will bless you
The closer the year of remission, the more likely it is that the loan will end up as a gift. But any loss incurred will be more than made up by God.

11. there will never cease to be needy ones
The realism of this verse contrasts with the ideal described in verse 4.

7–10. An obligation to generously support a kinsman who has fallen on hard times without calculating whether the help will be repaid. This is not so much a loan as an investment in a decent, compassionate, stable society.

7. do not harden your heart
One who ignores the needy is like an idolater [BT Ket. 68a]. Also, it is forbidden to insult the poor or accuse them of being undeserving.

9. In late Second Temple times, the law of remission did become a deterrent to lending, as anticipated by this verse. To protect people who needed loans and to prevent violation of verses 9 and 10, the sage Hillel (1st century B.C.E.–1st century C.E.) devised a legal means for circumventing the remission. The means was a document or declaration (prosbul) in which the lender declares that a specific loan will not be subject to remission. By this means, Hillel ensured that the law would not undermine its own purpose.

10. The Midrash imagines God saying, “You sustain My dependents [the poor, the widow, and the orphan] and I will sustain your dependents” [Tanḥ. 18].

11. For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land
Therefore, you must build the solution to poverty into the social structure, and not rely on people’s generosity. A poor person need never be embarrassed to accept help, because giving ts’daakah is an obligation, not charity resulting from kindheartedness. At the same time, the Sages also tell us: “Better to hay carcasses in the marketplace than to depend on public assistance because you feel the available work is beneath your dignity” [BT Pes. 113a].

HALAKHAH L’MA-ASEH
15:7–11, open your hand
These verses undergird Jewish poverty laws requiring us to feed, clothe, and house poor non-Jews as well as Jews. See also Exod. 12:49; Lev. 19:9–10, 25:25, 35; Deut. 24:10–22.

Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary
Copyright © 2001 by the Rabbinical Assembly
12. If a fellow Hebrew, man or woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall set him free. When you set him free, do not let him go empty-handed: furnish him out of the flock, threshing floor, and vat, with which the Lord your God has blessed you. Bear in mind that you were slaves in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you; therefore I enjoin this commandment upon you today.

16. But should he say to you, “I do not want to leave you”—for he loves you and your household and is happy with you—you shall take an awl and put it through his ear into the door, six years The standard term of indenture (see also v. 18; Exod. 21:2).

13. Here Deuteronomy goes beyond Exod. 21:2, in requiring that newly freed servants be given capital and supplies for living as they resume independent life. The aim is to prevent them from starting off penniless and possibly returning to the same wretched condition that originally led to servitude.

14. flock, threshing floor, and vat Some sheep or goats (or their products, such as milk or wool), some grain, and some wine.

16. The servant might consider that the security gained through subservience is preferable to the risks of independence. The fact that the law thinks it possible that the servant might love the master and desire servitude implies that the treatment of indentured servants was expected to be quite benign.

17. you shall take an awl See Exod. 21:2–6. The ceremony for making the servant’s status permanent consists of driving the point of an awl through his ear into the door of the master’s

HALAKHAH L’MA-ASEH
15:13–14. do not let him go empty-handed On the basis of these verses, some Jewish authorities require employers to pay severance to employees hired on more than a temporary basis. Others see it as a moral duty exclusively (Seifer Ha-Hinnukh 481–482).
and he shall become your slave in perpetuity. Do the same with your female slave. When you do set him free, do not feel aggrieved; for in the six years he has given you double the service of a hired man. Moreover, the Lord your God will bless you in all you do.

19 You shall consecrate to the Lord your God all male firstlings that are born in your herd and in your flock: you must not work your firstling ox or shear your firstling sheep. You and your household shall eat it annually before the Lord your God in the place that the Lord will choose. But if it has a defect, lameness or blindness, any serious defect, you shall not sacrifice it to the Lord your God. Eat it in your settlements, the impure among you no less than the pure, just like the gazelle and the deer.

THE SACRIFICE OF FIRSTBORN CATTLE
(vv. 19–23)

The first issue of all living things is considered holy, reserved for the Lord. Only after these are given to God, thereby acknowledging Him as the source and owner of all life, are the remainder of the crop and subsequent offspring of animals desacralized and freed for human use. Such practices were common in the ancient world.

19. **consecrate** Treat them as holy by not using them for any secular purpose and by eating them in a sacral meal.

20. **eat it annually before the Lord** As a sh'lamim sacrifice. According to 12:17–18, Levites also would be invited to take part in the meal (see Lev. 3).

21. **if it has a defect** Offering a defective animal to God shows contempt. One would never present such an animal to a human ruler. Hence, in 17:1, sacrificing flawed animals is regarded as an abomination. It is among the offenses that profane God's name in Lev. 22:2,17–25,32.

22. A disqualified firstling may be eaten as food and need not be replaced sacrificially by another animal, redeemed for money, or destroyed, as would be the case with the firstling of an impure animal.
23 Only you must not partake of its blood; you shall pour it out on the ground like water.

16 Observe the month of Abib and offer a passover sacrifice to the Lord your God, for it was in the month of Abib, at night, that the Lord your God freed you from Egypt. 2 You shall slaughter the passover sacrifice for the Lord your God, from the flock and the herd, in the

PILGRIMAGE FESTIVALS (16:1–17)
The main themes of these festivals are commemoration of the Exodus and gratitude for the harvest. Deuteronomy mentions the festivals to make the point that they must be observed only at the chosen sanctuary. Before the time of the single sanctuary, the festivals would have been observed by a pilgrimage to any of the country’s temple cities.

The Pesah Sacrifice and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (vv. 1–8)
The first festival consists of two distinct celebrations: (a) the pesah, the protective sacrifice offered at the end of the 14th day of the first month; and (b) the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the 7-day festival that begins on the 15th day (see Lev. 23:6; Num. 28:17). Note the difference between the pesah sacrifice described here and the one in Exod. 12, especially in regard to the nature of the animal, the method of its cooking, and where it is to be offered.

1. month of Abib Literally, “new ears of grain.” It is the old name of the month that falls in March and April, when ears of grain have just begun to appear. During the Babylonian exile (6th century B.C.E.), when Jews adopted the Babylonian month names that are still in use today, Abib (or Aviv) became known as Nisan.

passover sacrifice This sacrifice (pesah) reenacts the original pesah offering brought by the Israelites on the eve of the Exodus immediately before the last of the Ten Plagues. The name is derived from the verb pasah, which describes the manner in which God spared the firstborn in the houses of the Israelites after the blood of the sacrifice was smeared on their doorposts and lintels (Exod. 12:13,23,27). In the Vulgate, the verb appears as “[the Lord] passed over,” and the sacrifice is called “passover.” The Hebrew verb, however, does not mean “to pass over.” Most of the ancient translations and commentaries render the verb as the Lord “spared,” “had compassion,” or “protected.” The sacrifice, accordingly, is called the “protective sacrifice,” referring to the protection of the Israelites during the final plague. This very likely is the correct translation.

at night Although the Israelites themselves started to leave Egypt “on the morrow of the passover offering” (Num. 33:3), God’s action—the slaying of Egypt’s firstborn at night—is viewed as the essence of the event.

2. from the flock and the herd According to Exod. 12:3–5 and 21, the pesah offering was brought only from the flock and limited to sheep and goats. Deuteronomy clearly indicates that herd animals, large bovines, may be used as well. Perhaps this reflects a different economy, or a time when the sacrifice would be made at a central sanctuary where many households could share a larger animal.

CHAPTER 16

The summary of the festivals in other books of the Torah (Exod. 23:14–17; Lev. 23; Num. 28–29) tell us how to celebrate the holidays. In contrast, Deuteronomy tells us why: “for it was in the month of Abib, at night, that the Lord your God freed you from Egypt” (v. 1), “for you departed . . . hurriedly” (v. 3), “After the ingathering” (v. 13). One might think that the reason for observance should precede the commandment to observe, so that people would know why they were celebrating. It seems to be more effective pedagogy, though, especially for children, to start with the deed and only later explain that this is why we eat matzah on Pesah and live in booths on Sukkot.
place where the Lord will choose to establish His name. 3You shall not eat anything leavened with it; for seven days thereafter you shall eat unleavened bread, bread of distress—for you departed from the land of Egypt hurriedly—so that you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt as long as you live.

4For seven days no leaven shall be found with you in all your territory, and none of the flesh of what you slaughter on the evening of the first day shall be left until morning.

5You are not permitted to slaughter the passover sacrifice in any of the settlements that the Lord your God is giving you; 6but at the place where the Lord your God will choose to establish His name, there alone shall you slaughter the passover sacrifice, in the evening, at sunset, the time of day when you departed from Egypt.

6The original pesah sacrifice, which was indispensable in ensuring the safety of the Israelites during the 10th plague, is here seen as the onset of the Exodus.

7Cook Literally, “boil,” reflecting the practice of a populace settled in the promised land. (Compare this with Exod. 12:9, which requires roasting, reflecting pastoral nomadic practice.)

in the morning you may start on your journey back home The entire seven days need not be spent at the chosen place, because it is necessary to return home in time to begin the harvest. Either

3. anything leavened Food prepared from dough to which a leavening agent was added to make it rise. In postbiblical halakhah, this means any leavened product of wheat, barley, spelt, rye, or oats. Most Ashk'nasim also include rice, millet, corn, and legumes in this prohibition.

unleavened bread Matzah, bread made without yeast and not allowed to rise. It can be made quickly and was commonly prepared for unexpected guests. It is similar to the flat unleavened bread that Bedouins still bake on embers.

bread of distress The matzah is “bread of affliction” or “bread of poverty,” eaten by prisoners or by the poor. It is unpretentious, primitive fare that one would not normally eat. There is no evidence that the Israelites ate matzah when they were slaves. It commemorates the Exodus, not the enslavement.

remember the day of your departure By re-enacting the first pesah sacrifice and eating unleavened bread.

4. leaven Hebrew: s'or. Here refers to leavening agents, such as sourdough or yeast. It differs from “anything leavened” (hametz; v. 3), which refers to foodstuffs that have been leavened by leavening agents.

none of the flesh...shall be left until morning The sacrifice is offered at sunset (v. 6). It must be eaten through the night and finished by morning, thereby emulating procedures with the original pesah sacrifice in Egypt (see Exod. 12:8).

5. Once sacrificial worship is centralized in the chosen place, the pesah must be offered there. This is a characteristic requirement of Deuteronomy.

6. the time of day when you departed from Egypt The original pesah sacrifice, which was indispensable in ensuring the safety of the Israelites during the 10th plague, is here seen as the onset of the Exodus.

7. cook Literally, “boil,” reflecting the practice of a populace settled in the promised land. (Compare this with Exod. 12:9, which requires roasting, reflecting pastoral nomadic practice.)
Deuteronomy does not consider travel to be forbidden on festival days or it does not regard the second part of the day, following the Pesah sacrifice and meal, as sacred. Some traditional commentators hold that “in the morning” refers to the morning of the second day of the festival.

8. six days. That is, for the first six of the seven days on which it must be eaten (v. 3). According to postbiblical Jewish law, eating unleavened bread is obligatory only on the first day and not on the remaining days, though nothing leavened may be eaten.

solemn gathering. Because this gathering occurs after the people have returned home, it must take place in their hometowns. This clearly indicates that Deuteronomy intends to allow nonsacritical religious gatherings to take place throughout the country. Only sacrifice is restricted to the chosen place.

do no work. Unlike on Shabbat, preparation of food is allowed (Exod. 12:16).

The Feast of Weeks (vv. 9–12)

The name of the festival is derived from the fact that it is observed exactly seven weeks after the onset of the harvest. The passage of seven weeks is an essential aspect of the festival. Until seven weeks have passed, it is not known whether the harvest will be successfully completed and plentiful enough to sustain life and not be damaged by late rain or pests.

9. count off. That is, calculate.

seven weeks. The time needed to complete the harvest.

when the sickle is first put to the standing grain. That is, when the grain harvest begins, normally in April. The text gives no exact date, probably because the harvest cannot begin everywhere on the same date owing to regional variations in the climate. Thus farmers from diverse places probably would have observed the feast at different times.

10. Observe the Feast of Weeks. A time of solemn gathering on which no work is permitted and loaves made of new grain are offered as first fruits of the grain harvest (see Lev. 23:16–21). Presumably, tithes, firstlings, freewill, and obligatory offerings were also brought, as on other festivals.

freewill contribution. Offering what you can afford as a result of the harvest (cf. v. 17, 12:15, 15:14). The contribution might be of produce, animals, or money.
the fatherless, and the widow in your midst, at the place where the Lord your God will choose to establish His name. 12 Bear in mind that you were slaves in Egypt, and take care to obey these laws.

13 After the ingathering from your threshing floor and your vat, you shall hold the Feast of Booths for seven days. 14 You shall rejoice in your festival, with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your communities. 15 You shall hold a festival for the Lord your God seven days, in the place that the Lord will choose; for the Lord your God will bless all your crops and all your undertakings, and you shall have nothing but joy.

16 Three times a year—on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, on the Feast of Weeks, and on the Feast of Booths—all your males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place that He will choose. They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed, 17 but each with his own gift, according to the blessing that the Lord your God has bestowed upon you.

12. The memory of slavery is invoked to motivate extending this prescription to the servants and the poor mentioned in verse 11.

The Feast of Booths (vv. 13–15)

The third feast, at the end of the summer, celebrates the gathering of grain and new wine into storage for the coming year, the goal of all the preceding agricultural activities. This is the most exuberant of the festivals and has come to be called “the time of our rejoicing” (z’amán simhateinu).

13. After the ingathering from your threshing floor and from the vat That is, after the processed grain and the unfermented grape juice are put in containers and stored away in advance of the autumn rains.

Feast of Booths According to Lev. 23:42, the name is derived from the practice of dwelling in booths, or bowers, during the seven-day festival.

14. The harvest season and festivals were proverbial times for celebration.

15. all your crops . . . all your undertakings . . . nothing but joy The soaring extent of the blessing explains why the celebrating is to last a full seven days.

16. Feast of Unleavened Bread Here, the term must refer to the night of the pesah sacrifice (and not the following seven days), because that is the only time (according to v. 7) when worshipers are required to be at the chosen place.

males Only the adult males are obligated to appear, probably because pregnant and nursing women and young children could not reasonably be required to make long trips. Nevertheless, women and children frequently did take part, as is clear from verses 11 and 14.

appear before the Lord To pay Him homage at His sanctuary. This resembles the practice of homage to human sovereigns as reflected in treaties.

17. each with his own gift Literally, “each according to his means” (as in v. 10).
teen yearling lambs, without blemish; 33 the grain offerings and libations for the bulls, rams, and lambs, in the quantities prescribed; 34 and one goat for a purification offering—in addition to the regular burnt offering, its grain offering and libation.

35 On the eighth day you shall hold a solemn gathering; you shall not work at your occupations. 36 You shall present a burnt offering, a gift of pleasing odor to the Lord; one bull, one ram, seven yearling lambs, without blemish; 37 the grain offerings and libations for the bull, the ram, and the lambs, in the quantities prescribed; 38 and one goat for a purification offering—in addition to the regular burnt offering, its grain offering and libation.

39 All these you shall offer to the Lord at the stated times, in addition to your votive and free-will offerings, be they burnt offerings, grain offerings, libations, or offerings of well-being. 30 So Moses spoke to the Israelites just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

EIGHTH DAY (vv. 35–38)

Although Sukkot is a seven-day festival (v. 12), an eighth festival day is added. Its offerings, however, are not the same as those of the preceding festival; rather, they are the same as those of the 1st and the 10th of this month.

35. On the eighth day This, the eighth day, is an independent celebration, unconnected to the preceding festival. Work is prohibited on this day, thereby making it a “sacred occasion,” as is the first day of Sukkot (v. 12).

39. Personal offerings may be presented in addition to the public offerings stipulated above.

30:1. This verse tells us that Moses informed the Israelites about the religious calendar before addressing them on the next subject.

35. On Sh’mini Atzeret (the Hebrew name of the festival cited), the day immediately after Sukkot week, the offerings are more restrained. The Talmud pictures God as a host, welcoming representatives of all nations who come to pay homage on Sukkot; then, as the festival ends and the other nations depart, God says to Israel: “Stay here with Me a while longer for a more intimate celebration” (BT Suk. 55b).
The conclusion of the festival week of Sukkot, according to the Torah, is to be marked by a distinct celebration: “The eighth [sh’mi] day . . . is a solemn gathering [atzeret]” (Lev. 23:36). That passage and Num. 29:35 call it a “sacred occasion” [mikra kodesh]. After Solomon’s dedication of the Temple and celebration of Sukkot, he apparently marked this time in a special way, for “on the eighth day he let the people go [back] . . . to their homes” (1 Kings 8:66).

The choice of this haftarah is conditioned by its reference to the “eighth day,” but its formal structure centers on the prayer that is incorporated within a narrative prologue and epilogue. That prayer opens with thanks to God for fulfilling His promise to Moses and continues with a request for divine providence in the future.

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE CALENDAR

The recitation on Sh’mi Atzeret of a haftarah including 1 Kings 8:54 is mentioned in the Talmud (BT Meg. 31a). The Sages presumably understood the “eighth day” in verse 66 to be the festival of Atzeret itself, when the people performed their rites in the Temple and departed for home. The cited verse was apparently the opening line of the haftarah in ancient Palestine. It now concludes the reading according the practice of both Ashk’nazim and Sephardim.

Scripture says little about this holiday. According to Lev. 23:36, the “eighth day” from the onset of Sukkot is marked off as a “sacred occasion” (mikra kodesh), the standard expression for a festival day; but it is also called a “solemn gathering” (atzeret), without further explications.

The Sages, in their attention to detail, noted that according to Num. 29:36 only 1 bull was offered on Sh’mi Atzeret, whereas 70 bulls were offered during the prior festival week. This fact, along with the designation of the atzeret “for you” (an expression not used on the other days), stands behind the midrash that articulates a special relation of God and Israel on that day. On all seven days of the Sukkot festival, Israel “was busy with sacrifices for the 70 nations of the world.” In that midrash, God declares that “now (just) you and I shall rejoice together, and I shall not burden you overmuch” (PdRK, Sh’mi Atzeret 9). Sh’mi Atzeret thus came to mark an occasion of special intimacy between God and Israel.

The conclusion of the haftarah specifically notes that the people departed from the Temple “joyful [smehim] and glad of heart” (v. 66). The bountiful joy of the day is a theme repeated in liturgical hymn and midrashic homilies.
the altar of the Lord, his hands spread out toward heaven. 55He stood, and in a loud voice blessed the whole congregation of Israel:

56“Praised be the Lord who has granted a haven to His people Israel, just as He promised; not a single word has failed of all the gracious promises that He made through His servant Moses. 57May the Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers. May He never abandon or forsake us. 58May He incline our hearts to Him, that we may walk in all His ways and keep the commandments, the laws, and the rules, which He enjoined upon our fathers. 59And may these words of mine, which I have offered in supplication before the Lord, be close to the Lord our God day and night, that He may provide for His servant and for His people Israel, according to each day’s needs—60to the end that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord alone is God, there is no other. 61And may you be wholehearted with the Lord our God, to walk in His ways and keep His commandments, even as now.”

62The king and all Israel with him offered sacrifices before the Lord. 63Solomon offered 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep as sacrifices of well-being to the Lord. Thus the king and all the Israelites dedicated the House of the Lord. 64That day the king consecrated the center of the court that was in front of the House of the Lord. For it was there that he presented the burnt offerings, the grain offerings, and the fat parts of the offerings of well-being, because the bronze altar that was before the Lord was too small to hold the burnt offerings, the grain offerings, and the fat parts of the offerings of well-being.

64. the king consecrated the center of the court  That is, Solomon sanctified the floor of the court by dedicating the altar there (BT Zev. 59a). The center of the court thus refers to the floor of the court of the priests. This special sanctification was held because the “brass altar” was “too small to hold” all the abundant offerings made at that time (Radak, Ralbag). According to tradition, Solomon there established an altar of stones affixed to the floor (BT Zev. 59a–60a).
65So Solomon and all Israel with him—a great assemblage, [coming] from Lebo-hamath to the Wadi of Egypt—observed the Feast at that time before the Lord our God, seven days and again seven days, fourteen days in all. 66On the eighth day he let the people go. They bade the king good-bye and went to their homes, joyful and glad of heart over all the goodness that the Lord had shown to His servant David and His people Israel.