

THIRTY-FIRST MESSAGE:
HOLY ASSEMBLIES FOR THE SECOND DAY OF THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES
AND FOR THE FEAST OF WEEKS
Leviticus 23:9-22

Introduction

The second MESSAGE concerning Israel’s appointments with Jehovah dealt with holy assemblies during which the Israelites were to give to God the first produce of their spring harvests and to express dependence on Him as they worked to complete those harvests. Those holy assemblies were to be held on the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and during the Feast of Weeks or Harvest (later called the Feast of Pentecost). In MESSAGE 30, Jehovah had specified that holy assemblies were to be held on the first and last days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This MESSAGE specifies that a third holy assembly was to be held during that Feast and that it was to be used to bring to God a first-fruits offering from the spring barley harvest in behalf of the whole nation. It also was a convenient time for each Israelite to bring his own individual first-fruits offerings from his barley harvest.

It was logical to discuss the holy assembly for the Feast of Weeks in the same MESSAGE, because during the Feast of Weeks the Israelites were to bring to God a first-fruits offering for the whole nation from their wheat harvest. It was also a convenient time for each Israelite to bring his own first-fruits offering from his wheat harvest.

Another significant reason for discussing the two holy assemblies together was that both dealt with practices that were not to begin until the Israelites arrived in the Land. The other assemblies described in this chapter were to be observed in the wilderness as well as in the Land, but these two are related to the first-fruits of the barley and the wheat harvests. The Israelites could not celebrate harvest times until they ceased their travels in the wilderness and settled in the Land as farmers.

It must be recognized that the discussion in this MESSAGE of the first-fruits offering to be presented on the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread does not specifically mention a holy assembly. Three evidences suggest that a holy assembly for that day is implied in this MESSAGE: (1) The discussion of the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread occurs in the midst of five MESSAGES which are introduced by two Introductory Notes that state that the topic to be discussed is “appointments” that were to be called “holy assemblies” (see comments on Lev. 23:2,4 in MESSAGE 30). (2) The other four MESSAGES in the series specifically discuss holy assemblies. It would be inappropriate and unlikely to discuss the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the midst of five MESSAGES that deal with holy assemblies if a holy assembly was not to be held on that day. (3) A fruit-fruits offering in behalf of the whole nation was to be presented on the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. That offering would have had little meaning if all the people had not been present to witness it and participate in it.

This MESSAGE may be outlined as follows:

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CHAPTER 23

Introductory Note (23:9)

Verse 9. **And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying,**

A new MESSAGE to Moses is introduced by this verse. Even though a new MESSAGE begins with this verse, the instructions continue from the previous MESSAGE without breaking the chain of thought. The MESSAGE continues to deal with observances to be conducted during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This MESSAGE is so closely connected with the previous MESSAGE that it is as if Jehovah went on to finish what He was saying after a brief interruption. The same continuation of thought continues through the next three MESSAGES as well, adding to the impression that the five MESSAGES of Leviticus 23 were all a part of one set of instructions and were all spoken to Moses on the same day.

- A. Holy assembly for the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (23:10-14)

Verse 10. **Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, When you come into the Land that I am giving to you and you shall harvest its harvest, then you shall bring an omer of first-fruits of your harvest to the priest,**

Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them. This MESSAGE was to be relayed to everyone in Israel. It concerned a practice that was to be observed in behalf of everyone in the nation. They all needed to know about it, but also all the people would need to be present to participate when the instructions were carried out.

When you come into the Land that I am giving to you and you shall harvest its harvest. Though this commandment was given in the wilderness, it was to be observed after the Israelites arrived in the Land. The MESSAGE continued to deal with observances to be conducted in connection with harvest. The Israelites could not plant, cultivate, and harvest crops in the wilderness,

so these instructions concerned what they were to do when they would come into the Land.

then you shall bring an omer of first-fruits of your harvest to the priest. In Exodus 23:16,19; 34:22,26 Jehovah had instructed the Israelites to bring the best of the first-fruits of their wheat harvest to Jehovah during the Feast of Weeks. Also He had mentioned first-fruits in Leviticus 2:12. The discussion at that point concerned seasons that were to be used in presenting offerings to God. In Lev. 2:11, Jehovah said fire-offerings were not to be seasoned with honey and leaven. In Leviticus 2:12, he said that prohibition did not apply to first-fruits because they were not to be offered on the altar as fire-offerings (see comments on Lev. 2:11-12 in MESSAGE 1).

No further instructions concerning first-fruits had been given until these verses. They are mentioned here because first-fruits were to be presented in a holy assembly during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This instruction is a completely new requirement, because it applies to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, instead of the Feast of Harvest for which a first-fruits offering had been mentioned earlier. The first-fruits offering during the Feast of Weeks is discussed in verses 17 and 20 of this MESSAGE (see comments on verses 16b-19 below under the heading You must bring from your dwellings two wave-loaves of bread. They must be two-tenths [of an ephah] of fine flour with leaven. They must be baked as first-fruits to Jehovah and on verse 20 below). However, verses 10-14 discuss a first-fruits offering that was to be presented during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

The first-fruits offering that is described in this MESSAGE was to be presented in behalf of the whole nation. Jehovah showed that was His intention by using the plural “you” when he spoke of it. Only one offering was to be offered, so using the plural for the offerers showed that it was not to be offered by one person but in behalf of all the people. This first-fruits offering in behalf of the nation did not substitute for every Israelite’s responsibility to bring his own first-fruits offering from every harvest and from every increase he gained. Leviticus 2:12, where first-fruits are first mentioned in the Book of Leviticus, clearly means

that every Israelite was to bring his own first-fruits offerings. That verse uses the singular for the offerer, showing that the command applied to every Israelite individually. This verse uses the plural for those bringing the offering, meaning that it was to be offered in behalf of the whole nation. This offering in behalf of the whole congregation illustrated what every Israelite was also to do individually, and it showed that the nation needed to be grateful for its harvests and all its increases just as much as every individual did.

This verse specifies that the amount of first-fruits that were to be brought to the altar in behalf of the nation was an omer. An omer was a dry measure which equaled one-tenth of an ephah (Ex. 16:36), making it equivalent to either about 3 ½ quarts or 3 ½ pints (see comments on Lev. 5:11 in MESSAGE 2). Hebrew grammarians have held almost unanimously that in this verse the word *omer* means something different from a measurement, or rather that the word in this verse is a different word with the same spelling. That conclusion is unnecessary. In every verse where the word occurs, the meaning of a measurement makes perfect sense. Therefore, the best understanding of this verse is that Jehovah specified that the amount of a fruit-fruits offering to be offered on this occasion was to be an omer. The amount of this first-fruits offering and all first-fruits offerings was not large. The next verses show that first-fruits offerings were to be used to provide support for the priests, and an omer would not provide much support. However, if all Israelites practiced it along with the other provisions God made to meet the needs of the priests, the priests would be provided for adequately.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread came at about the middle of March, so it was in the spring of the year. At that time of year, the Israelites would be beginning to bring in their spring barley harvest. The Israelites planted grain twice a year, one time in the summer for harvesting in the fall and the other time in the fall for harvesting the next spring. The first crop to ripen in the spring was the barley harvest, so this verse describes first-fruits from the barley harvest. That conclusion is confirmed by Numbers 15:20-21, where this offering is called “the first of your coarse flour.” Coarse flour was made of barley, in contrast to finer, lighter textured

flour that was made from wheat (see comments on Lev. 2:1 in MESSAGE 1). First-fruits from the barley harvest were important because barley was the first crop harvested in the year. First-fruits from that harvest provided for the needs of the priests when their supplies would be low after the winter. Also, if the Israelites were faithful in giving first-fruits from the first harvest, they likely would continue the practice with later harvests in the year. Bringing an omer to God from the first harvest in the year showed that the Israelites recognized that this harvest and all of their harvests came from Jehovah. It was an expression of gratitude for the harvest. It also was a way of recognizing that, since their harvests came from Jehovah, the first and best of what they gathered in the harvest belonged to Him. The first-fruits offering in behalf of the whole nation provided inspiration and encouragement for each individual Israelite to be faithful in bringing his own individual first-fruits offerings also.

11 And you shall wave the omer before Jehovah for your acceptance on the morrow after the sabbath, and the priest must wave it.

And you shall wave the omer before Jehovah. The omer of grain that constituted the first-fruits offering was to be presented to the priest, and the priest was to wave it over the altar. The significance of waving an offering over the altar in a forward and backward motion was that it showed that the offering was brought to Jehovah but that Jehovah in turn assigned it to the priests to assist with their support (see comments on Leviticus 7:30 in MESSAGE 9). This symbolism was important because first-fruits were not roasted on the altar as fire-offerings but only waved over the altar and then given directly to the priests for their support. This reference to waving the omer over the altar is the first indication of what was to be done with first-fruits and why they were different from fire-offerings.

for your acceptance. The priest’s waving the first-fruits offering over the altar also showed that the Israelites and their offering were accepted by God.

on the morrow after the sabbath, and the priest must wave it. The waving was to take place “on the morrow after the sabbath.” This statement makes sense only if these instructions continue the thought of the previous MESSAGE. The sabbath referred to is a sabbath that had been mentioned in the previous MESSAGE in connection with the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The previous MESSAGE had said that the first and last days of that Feast were to be sabbaths. In addition, a weekly sabbath would occur during the Feast, because it did not begin on a specific day of the week but on the tenth day after a New Moon. (see comments on Lev. 23: 6-8 in MESSAGE 30). If the sabbath referred to here means the weekly sabbath, the instruction is confusing because it is very unspecific as to which weekly sabbath is meant. Since the date of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was set in relation to the new moon, the weekly sabbath fell on different days in relation to the Feast in different years. Therefore, if “the sabbath” means the weekly sabbath, it could refer to the sabbath day before, during, or after the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Most interpreters understand this sabbath to be the sabbath that fell within the Feast. Thus, this offering in behalf of the nation would be brought on the day after the sabbath day, but that day would vary in relation to the Feast from year to year. For those attending the ceremony, it would be confusing to know which day the first-fruits ceremony would be held. It is likely that many individual Israelites took advantage of that occasion to offer their own individual first-fruits offerings, so it would be important for them to know when the nation’s first-fruits offering would be offered each year. It would be much more helpful to the Israelites if the first-fruits offering in behalf of the nation always was held on the same day in relation to the Feast. That problem is avoided if “the sabbath” referred to here is understood to be one of the two special sabbaths of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The previous MESSAGE had specified that the first and last days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread were to be days of refraining from occupational work, that is, sabbath days (see comments on Lev. 23:7 in MESSAGE 30). The day after the Feast of Unleavened Bread was finished would be an unlikely day for a public celebration, because people would already have

departed for home. So the sabbath referred to in this verse must have been the sabbath with which the Feast of Unleavened Bread began. Since waving an omer of first-fruits was to occur on “the morrow after the sabbath,” it was to be held on the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

The second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was the sixteenth day of the month Abib, or around the first of April according to our calendar. Actually, the first of April was early even for the barley harvest, which began in earnest around the middle of April. In later years, to be sure New grain was available for the first-fruits ceremony, the Israelites raised a special crop for this occasion and had a set ceremony for cutting the stalks to be used as first-fruits for the nation. Since the celebration came early, the offering was genuinely first-fruits. It also allowed the Israelites to attend this ceremony before they were busy gathering the main part of their barley harvest.

12 And you shall offer on the day of your waving the omer a pristine lamb a year old as a rededication-offering to Jehovah,

When the first-fruits offering was presented in behalf of the whole nation, the Israelites also were to offer a rededication-offering to Jehovah. A rededication-offering signified complete surrender to God (see comments on Lev. 1:3 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading If his offering [is] a rededication-offering). The animal offered as a rededication-offering could be a bull (see comments on Lev. 1:3 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading of the herd and a pristine male), a male sheep or goat (see comments on Lev. 1:10 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading And if his offering is of the flock, [that is] of sheep or of goats), or either a turtle dove or a young pigeon (see comments on Lev. 1:14 in MESSAGE 1). This verse specifies that the animal to be brought as a rededication-offering to accompany the nation’s first-fruits offering was to be a year old lamb. It was large enough to express gratitude for God’s gift of the harvest but not so large as to be a financial burden at a time when many other offerings were being offered.

13 And an homage-offering with it two tenths [of an ephah] of fine flour mixed with oil, and its liquid offering a fourth of a hin of wine, a fire-offering to Jehovah, a soothing fragrance,

And an homage-offering with it two tenths [of an ephah] of fine flour. They also were to present an homage-offering to accompany the rededication-offering. An homage-offering symbolized that all their possessions came from Jehovah and that they owed them all back to Him in gratitude. It taught the principle of stewardship (see comments on Lev. 2:1 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading offers an offering of homage to Jehovah). An ordinary homage-offering could consist of raw flour (see comments on Lev. 2:1 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading his offering may be [of] fine flour), oven-baked bread (see comments on Lev. 2:4 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading [consisting of] baked fine flour from an oven), grilled bread (see comments on Lev. 2:5 in MESSAGE 1), or pan-baked bread (see comments on Lev. 2:7-10 in MESSAGE 1). However, when the homage-offering was first introduced in MESSAGE 1, a special procedure was commanded for an homage-offering that was offered with early produce. It was to consist of “new grain parched in fire, garden-fresh meal” accompanied by oil and frankincense (see comments on Lev. 2:14-16 in MESSAGE 1). An homage-offering of early produce was the type of homage-offering that was to be offered on the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

New information that is given here concerning an homage-offering of early produce is that it was to consist of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour (concerning the size of an ephah, see comments on Lev. 5:11 in MESSAGE 2). Even though the Feast of Unleavened Bread celebrated the incoming barley harvest, the homage-offering to be offered at the same time as the first-fruits offering was to consist of fine flour, which means wheat flour (see comments on Lev. 2:1 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading his offering may be [of] fine flour). Homage-offerings always consisted of wheat flour, because Jehovah deserved the best (see comments on Lev. 2:1,4,5,7 in MESSAGE 1).

This verse is the fourth reference that states the amount of flour to be used in preparing an

homage-offering. Leviticus 6:20 (6:13 in the Hebrew text) states that the continual homage-offering that was to be offered each morning and evening was to consist of a tenth of an ephah of fine flour (see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 6 under the heading the tenth part of an ephah of fine flour for a homage-offering). Leviticus 14:10 says an homage-offering that was to be a part of the cleansing ceremonies for a person healed of tsaraath was to consist of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour (see comments on that verse in MESSAGE 17 under the heading and three-tenths [ephah] of fine flour [as] an homage-offering). Leviticus 14:21 says that, if the person healed of tsaraath was poor and unable to offer three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour as an homage-offering, he could offer one-tenth of an ephah (see comments on Lev. 14:21-23 in MESSAGE 17). These references make it clear that the amount of flour to be used for an homage-offering varied with the occasion. Later in Numbers 15:2-10, Jehovah gave general rules for the amount of fine flour to be used for an homage-offering that accompanied various animals. The instructions were as follows:

<u>Animal</u>	<u>Homage-offering</u>
Female of herd or flock	1/10 ephah
Ram	2/10 ephah
Bull	3/10 ephah

The amount of fine flour that is specified in this verse for the homage-offering that accompanied first-fruits in behalf of the whole nation is two-tenths of an ephah. That amount of flour is the same as the amount called for in Numbers 15:6 to accompany the offering of a ram, and verse 12 of this chapter says the rededication-offering to be offered with first-fruits was to be a year-old male sheep, which is a ram (see comments on Lev. 5:11 in MESSAGE 2 concerning the size of an ephah). All these instructions are consistent with each other. This kind of consistency would have been impossible if the instructions of these books came from a clumsy combination of different documents that developed over a period of many years, as the advocates of the Development Theory propose.

mixed with oil. In an homage-offering, the flour or bread was always mixed with or smeared

with oil. This verse refers only briefly to the oil, because instructions concerning the oil had been given previously (see comments on Lev. 2:1,4,5,7 in MESSAGE 1). However, the amount of oil to be used with the fine flour is not stated in MESSAGE 1, and it is not stated in this MESSAGE. The amount to be used becomes clear from instructions concerning liquid-offerings that also were to be offered with homage-offerings.

and its liquid-offering. This verse gives more attention to a liquid-offering that was to accompany the homage-offering, because it had not been mentioned previously in Leviticus, though it had been mentioned three times in the Book of Exodus (Ex. 29:40,41; 30:9). The name of this offering is based on a root that means “to pour.” The name means “a thing poured out” or “a liquid.” However, neither the verb nor the noun was ever used to refer to pouring water or any other liquids in daily life. Both words were always used to refer to pouring out liquids for sacred purposes. More specifically, they were used either to refer to pouring wine on the altar as an offering to God or to pouring melted metal to make molded images (Is. 41:29; 48:5; Jer. 10:14; 51:17). Both the verb and the noun referred, not to drinking but to pouring. Though the noun usually has been translated “drink-offering” in English translations, a much more accurate translation is “liquid-offering.” “Drink-offering” gives the false impression that the purpose of the offering was to provide drink to sustain Jehovah, an idea that is pagan and totally foreign to the revelations given at Sinai. “Libation” is an accurate rendering of the noun, but it is not consistent in form with the names of the other offerings that are used in this writing. Therefore, the term “liquid-offering” will be used to translate the name of this offering throughout these comments.¹

Offering liquid-offerings appears to have been an ancient practice, because Jacob poured a liquid-offering over the pillar he set up to mark the place of his dream experience when he was running

away from Esau (Gen. 35:14). Liquid-offerings were mentioned previously in the revelations at Sinai in Exodus 29:40, 41, where Jehovah commanded that a liquid-offering was to be part of the continual-offerings to be offered each morning and evening into the indefinite future. They also were mentioned in Exodus 30:9, where Jehovah said a liquid-offering was not to be offered on the altar of incense. Apparently Jehovah introduced one difference in the practice of liquid-offerings from practices that existed before Sinai. The difference can be seen from Genesis 35:14. In that verse, Jacob offered the liquid-offering by itself; whereas in the Sinai regulations a liquid-offering was always offered in conjunction with an homage-offering (Ex. 29:40,41; Lev. 23:13,18,37; Num. 6:15,17; 15:5,7,10,24; 28:7,8,9,10,14,15,24,25,27, 28,30,31,33,34,37,38,39). In Israel the liquid-offering was not considered to be a separate type of offering with a distinct meaning of its own but rather an offering that added to the meaning of the homage-offering. This conclusion is strengthened by the instructions in Leviticus 1-7, where the different types of fire-offerings are listed and described and liquid-offerings are not mentioned at all.

A fourth of a hin. The amount of the liquid-offering that was to be offered to accompany the homage-offering on the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is specified to be one-fourth of a hin. A hin was a liquid measure equal to about 6 ½ pints, so a fourth of a hin would be a little over 1 ½ pints. A hin had been mentioned previously in Exodus 29:40; 30:24 and in Leviticus 19:36 (see comments on Lev. 19:36 in MESSAGE 23).

Numbers 15:4-8 contains rules for the amounts of oil and wine that were to accompany homage-offerings. Those rules are:

<u>Fine flour</u>	<u>Oil</u>	<u>Wine</u>
1/10 ephah	¼ hin	¼ hin
2/10 ephah	⅓ hin	⅓ hin
3/10 ephah	½ hin	½ hin

Since the homage-offering mentioned in this verse was to be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour, the rules above would indicate that the amount of oil and wine to be used would be one-third of a hin,

¹ KJV, RSV, ABV, LB, HCSB usually and NWV always translate this term as “drink offering.” ASV, NEV usually render it as “drink-offering.” SGV, DRV, JV, NABV usually and NASV, MV always render it as “libation.”

whereas the actual amount called for is a fourth of a hin. The reason for the seeming discrepancy is that the rules in Numbers 15 relate to homage-offerings presented by individuals, as is shown by the use of the pronoun “he” and “you” (singular) throughout that passage. The first-fruits offering referred to in this verse was offered not for individuals but for the whole nation. Special rules applied for it, as they did for all other special forms of the homage-offering. The amount of wine specified for this occasion does not conflict with Numbers 15:4-8. They are simply different for this special occasion.

Since in all other instances, the amounts of wine and oil that were to accompany homage-offerings were equal, it is a logical and safe conclusion that they were to be equal in this homage-offering as well. So the amount of oil to be used also was one-fourth of a hin.

of wine. Liquid-offerings always consisted of wine (Ex. 29:40; Lev. 23:13; Num. 15:5,7,10; 28:14). The word translated “wine” in this verse (*yayin*) was a general word that could be used for any beverage made from grapes. It could refer to grape juice freshly gathered from the field, that is, juice while it was still in the grapes (Jer. 40:10,12) or to juice freshly squeezed from the winepress (Is. 16:10; Jer. 48:33). It could also refer to fermented wine that was clearly intoxicating (for example Gen. 9:21; 1 Sam. 1:14; Is. 5:22). The Hebrews had another word that meant only “new wine,” that is, grape juice. (*tirosh*). They had still a different word that meant “strong drink” or “intoxicating alcohol” (*shekar*). Though the word used in this verse is the general word and does not clarify whether the liquid was freshly squeezed grape juice or fermented wine, the use made of it shows that in this case it means fermented wine. Fresh juice poured over coals puts fire out. The alcohol content of fermented wine makes fire flair up into a beautiful and spectacular flame, but it does not cause sufficient heat to burn up meat quickly. The conclusion that a liquid-offering consisted of fermented wine is confirmed in Numbers 28:7, where the Hebrew word that means “strong drink” is used to refer to a liquid-offering.

Some have sought to use the liquid-offering as a defense for drinking alcoholic beverages. That contention is not legitimate, because the liquid-offering had nothing to do with drinking. It was not to be drunk by the offerer or the priest. Neither did it symbolize providing drink for Jehovah. The most that legitimately can be concluded from the burning of wine on the altar is that alcohol has some legitimate uses. It does not encourage the belief that using it as a beverage is one of those legitimate uses. Jehovah had already warned the priests not to drink either wine (*yayin*) or strong drink (*shekar*) while on duty so they would not die (see comments on Lev. 10:9 in MESSAGE 12).

This verse adds new information about homage-offerings by showing that they were to consist, not only of fine flour, but also of oil and wine. That combination was appropriate in portraying its meaning. An homage-offering symbolized that the worshiper recognized that all his possessions came from God and that he was responsible to God for how he used them (see comments on Lev. 2:1 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading offers an offering of homage to Jehovah). Grain, oil, and wine were the principal crops in the Land. Since the Israelites were to be mainly an agricultural people when they settled in the Land, those three products effectively symbolized all of their wealth and possessions.

a fire-offering to Jehovah, a soothing fragrance.

These expressions were regular descriptions of offerings offered on The Tabernacle altar. “Fire-offering” was a general term for all of the offerings (see comments on Lev. 1:9 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading a fire-offering). “A soothing fragrance” means the offerings smelled good to God and were pleasing to Him (see comments on Lev. 1:9 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading a soothing fragrance to Jehovah). The combination of flour, oil, and wine in an homage-offering was received by Jehovah with pleasure.

14 And you must not eat bread or summer produce or garden products until the same day, until your bringing of the offering of your God. It is a statute for an age through your generations in all your dwellings.

And you must not eat bread or summer produce or garden products. Until the day the omer of first-fruits of the harvest was waved over the altar, no Israelite was to eat any produce from the new spring crop. The words translated “summer produce” and “garden products” are rare, and their meanings are not well known. Various suggestions have been made concerning their meaning, and a variety of renderings have been used in English translations.² The best information available indicates that the first word is connected in some way with the warmer weather of spring and summer, and the second word is connected in some way with a garden. The translations used in this writing indicate that the Israelites were not to eat products that came either from open fields in the warm growing season or from their smaller, more private gardens until the first-fruits offering was waved over the altar.

until the same day, until your bringing of the offering of your God. Whatever the specific meanings of the two little-known words, the instructions in this verse are clear. The Israelites were not to eat any produce from their spring crops until the ceremony of first-fruits had been conducted on the second day of The Feast of Unleavened Bread. When they had formally recognized that their crops, and thus their livelihoods, came from God, then they were free to enjoy the produce God had given them. Since the omer of first-fruits of harvest was waved over the altar very early in the spring, this requirement was not a hardship on any Israelite. It did have deep spiritual significance.

² KJV translates these words as “or parched grain, nor green ears,” NASB as “nor roasted grain nor new growth,” HCSB as “roasted grain or *any new* grain,” RV and LITV as “parched grain, nor fresh ears,” RSB as “grain parched or fresh,” NRSB as “parched grain or fresh ears,” ASV as “nor parched grain nor fresh ears,” BBE as “dry grain or new grain,” CEV as “new grain or anything made from it,” CJB as “dry grain or fresh grain,” GNB as “whether raw, roasted, or baked into bread,” and MSG as “roasted or fresh grain.”

[It is] a statute for an age through your generations in all your dwelling places. By order of a law from God, waving the omer of first-fruits of harvest was an occasion to be observed annually into the indefinite future by all Israelites wherever they might live. Yet the wording leaves open the possibility that God might cancel the practice at some time in the future, which He did in Jesus (see comments on Lev. 3:17 in MESSAGE 1)

A. Holy assembly for the Feast of Weeks (23:15-21)

Verses 15-16a. **15 And you shall count from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day you brought the omer of the wave offering, seven complete weeks.**

16a You must count to the morrow after the seventh week fifty days.

These verses begin to introduce another Feast Day on which a holy assembly was to be held. No name is given for this Feast anywhere in this passage, but it undoubtedly was the same occasion that was called “Feast of Weeks” in Exodus 34:22. Even without mentioning the name, these verses explain the reason for that name. It was called “Feast of Weeks” because it was to be held seven weeks plus one day after the offering of the waving of an omer of first fruits. The count was to begin on the day after the sabbath, which must mean the sabbath mentioned in verse 11. Thus, the count was to begin on the day the omer of first-fruits was to be waved. From that day, they were to count seven weeks plus one day. The word translated “weeks” in these two verses is the word that means “sabbath.” In these verses, it was used to refer, not to a day free of work, but to a period of time consisting of seven units. In this case, the units were days, so the expression means a week (see comments on Lev. 25:8 in MESSAGE 37; also compare Dan. 9:24,25,26,27) The time for the Feast of Weeks was not measured by seven weekly sabbaths from the waving first-fruits but by seven periods of seven days plus one day after the waving of an omer of first-fruits. The Feast of Weeks was to be held on the fiftieth day after the waving of an omer of first-fruits of harvest.

Another name was used for this Feast in Exodus 23:16. There it is called the “Feast of Harvest.” That name indicates the occasion it was to celebrate. It was another celebration of harvest. The harvest to be celebrated by this Feast seems clearly to mean the wheat harvest, since the barley harvest had already been celebrated by offering an omer of first-fruits of the harvest on the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Later, when the Israelites began using the Greek language, the day came to be called Pentecost, which in Greek means “fifty days” (Acts 2:1). That name also was drawn from the length of time that it followed the waving of an omer of first-fruits.

Verse 16b-18. **16b Then you shall present an homage offering of new grain to Jehovah.**

17 You must bring from your dwellings two wave-loaves of bread. They must be two-tenths [of an ephah] of fine flour with leaven. They must be baked as first-fruits to Jehovah.

18 And you shall present with the bread seven pristine male lambs a year old and one young bull, a son of a herd and two rams. They must be a rededication-offering to Jehovah with their homage-offering and their liquid-offerings, a fire-offering, a soothing fragrance to Jehovah.

19 And you shall bring one buck of the goats as a sin-offering and two male-lambs a year old as a slaughter-offering of peace-offerings.

Then you shall present. Though this Feast had been mentioned in Exodus 23:16; 34:22, this present passage gives the first real description of how it was to be celebrated. It was to be observed through offering to Jehovah some specific offerings. In advance of the offerings, the Israelites were to gather the bread and the animals that were to be offered so they could be presented to the priest at The Tabernacle on the specified day. The offerings to be gathered were too extensive to be required of every individual Israelite. Therefore, they were to be gathered in behalf of the nation, like the offerings of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The passage does not state who was responsible for gathering the offerings, but likely some of the elders would obtain them in behalf of all the people. Obviously, careful preparation needed to be made in advance for the offerings of the day.

an homage offering of new grain to Jehovah. The first offering to be obtained in advance was an homage-offering of new grain. That statement refers to an homage-offering of the type Jehovah described as “an homage-offering of early produce” when He first explained homage-offerings to Moses (see comments on Lev. 2:14-16 in MESSAGE 1). Jehovah also had commanded that an homage-offering of that type was to be offered on the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (see comments on Lev. 23:13 above).

Fifty days after waving an omer of first-fruits came about the middle of May. By that time, the barley harvest had been completed and the wheat harvest was just beginning to come in. The wheat harvest came mainly in our month of June. So, this Feast of Weeks occurred during the very earliest part of the wheat harvest, just as waving an omer of the first-fruits of harvest came in the very earliest part of the barley harvest (see comments on v. 11 above). Thus, the “homage-offering of new grain” was an homage-offering made from the new wheat crop. It was to honor Jehovah at the beginning of the wheat harvest, just as waving an omer of the first-fruits of harvest honored Him at the beginning of the barley harvest. It required careful preparation in advance to obtain an homage-offering properly prepared from new grain that early in the wheat harvest.

You must bring from your dwellings two wave-loaves of bread. They must be two-tenths [of an ephah] of fine flour with leaven. They must be baked as first-fruits to Jehovah

A second item to be prepared in advance was two loaves of bread that were called “wave-loaves.” That term “wave-loaves” is used here for the first time. However, Exodus 29:27; Leviticus 7:34; 10: 14,15 had used the term “waved breast” to refer to the breast of a slaughter-offering that was to be waved over the altar and then given to the priest to assist with his support (see comments on Lev. 7:30,34 in MESSAGE 9 and on Lev. 10:14 in MESSAGE 13 under the heading And you must eat the waved breast and the contributed leg). Obviously the expression “wave-loaves” means they were to be waved over the altar. Waving over the altar means they were not to be roasted on the

altar but waved over the altar to show they were given to Jehovah, who in turn assigned them to the priests for their use. It was the same action that was required for the omer of first-fruits of harvest on the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (see comments on v. 11 above under the heading And you shall wave the omer before Jehovah). Calling these loaves “wave-loaves” identified them as first-fruits offerings. First-fruits offerings were to be prepared from the new harvest, which in this case meant the new wheat harvest.

The two loaves together were to consist of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour ground from the new wheat harvest. The amount of fine flour to be waved for the barley harvest was an omer. An omer was one-tenth of an ephah, so twice the amount of flour was to be used for the first-fruits offering for the wheat harvest as was used for the barley harvest (see comments on v. 10 above under the heading then you shall bring an omer of first-fruits of your harvest to the priest). In addition, the first-fruits offering for the barley harvest was to be presented as flour, whereas the first-fruits offering for the wheat harvest was to be baked into bread. The better offering for the wheat harvest probably showed the greater value of the wheat harvest as compared with the barley harvest.

The wave-loaves were to be prepared with leaven in the dough. The use of leaven further identified them as first-fruits offerings. Homage-offerings that were roasted on the altar were prepared without leaven or honey, because those ingredients tended to encourage spoilage. First-fruits offerings, on the other hand, were prepared with leaven, because they were not roasted on the altar but waved over the altar and then given to the priests for their support (see comments on Lev. 2:11-12 in MESSAGE 1).

The wave-loaves also were described as “from your dwellings,” meaning they were to be like the bread regularly used in the homes of the Israelites, which was leavened bread. This description further identifies this offering as first-fruits, because first-fruits offerings were prepared with leaven (see comments on Lev. 2:12 in MESSAGE 1). Finally verse 17 says plainly that the loaves were to be “baked as first-fruits.” That

statement removes all doubt that the wave-loaves were first-fruits offerings for the whole nation.

Presenting the wave-loaves for the nation provided a convenient time for individual Israelites to bring their own first-fruits offering from their wheat harvest.

And you shall present. In addition to the homage-offering and the first-fruits offering from the early produce of the new harvest, Jehovah specified other fire-offerings that were to be offered at the Feast of Weeks. The descriptions in this chapter of holy assemblies for other Feasts state that fire-offerings were to be offered, but the specific offerings to be offered are not given:

Feast of Unleavened Bread	MESSAGE 30, v. 8
Memorial of Noise-Making	MESSAGE 32; v. 24
Day of Coverings	MESSAGE 33, v. 27
Feast of Booths	MESSAGE 34, v. 36

The offerings to be presented on those occasions are described in Numbers 28-29. But the offerings to be offered at the holy assembly on the Feast of Weeks are listed in this chapter, though they are also described in a little more detail in Numbers 28:26-31. The reason they are described here is that the offerings on this day were in elaborate forms that dramatically symbolized the significance of the day. They were so closely related to the meaning of the day that the Feast can scarcely be understood without them.

with the bread seven pristine male lambs a year old and one young bull, a son of a herd and two rams. They must be a rededication-offering to Jehovah with their homage-offering and their liquid-offerings, a fire-offering, a soothing fragrance to Jehovah. This verse describes a third offering that was to be prepared in advance for the offerings of the Feast of Weeks. It was a group of items that together were to constitute one rededication offering. Rededication-offerings symbolized complete commitment to Jehovah, and they could consist of animals from the herd, from the flock, or of birds (see comments on Lev. 1:3-17 in MESSAGE 1). For the Feast of Weeks, the offering was to consist of seven one-year-old lambs, one young bull, and two rams. The use of many

animals showed the importance of Israel's completely dedicating themselves to God as they anticipated the incoming wheat harvest.

One difference occurs between the description of this offering here and the description in Number 28:27. Numbers 28:27 calls for seven male lambs, two bulls and one ram, while Leviticus 23:18 calls for seven male lambs, one bull and two rams. Most likely this variation was caused by a copyist error in one of the passages. It seems impossible to determine which reading is in error. Fortunately, the symbolism and spiritual meaning is identical either way.

Along with the animals, they were also to obtain grain for an homage-offering that was to accompany the rededication-offering. Evidently this homage-offering was to be in addition to the homage-offering mentioned in verse 16, which was to be presented for its own separate significance. The homage-offering in this verse was to add to the significance of the rededication-offering. This is the first mention of an homage-offering offered to complement a rededication-offering, but offering them together was highly appropriate. A rededication-offering symbolized the complete dedication of the worshiper's life to Jehovah, while an homage-offering symbolized the dedication of the worshiper's possessions to Jehovah. The two go together, and a person can hardly do one without the other.

In addition to the animals and bread that were to be gathered for the rededication-offering, they were also to obtain wine for liquid offerings. This statement is the first mention of liquid-offerings to be offered with rededication-offerings. Perhaps adding liquid-offerings to the meat that was roasted on the altar was an optional practice. Using liquid-offerings with the animals for the rededication-offering during the Feast of Weeks was not optional. When this rededication-offering was roasted on that altar, the combination of the meat and the bread and the flaming of the fire from the wine must have produced a powerful sight and an impressive demonstration of gratitude to God for the anticipated bountiful harvest.

And you shall bring one buck of the goats as a sin-offering. A fourth item that was to be secured in advance to prepare for the offerings of the Feast of Weeks was "a buck of the goats," that is, a male goat to be used for a sin-offering. A sin-offering symbolized repentance and forgiveness (see comments on Lev. 4:2 in MESSAGE 2). It was appropriate for the Feast of Weeks, because when the nation dedicated itself and its possessions to God in appreciation for the harvest, seeking forgiveness for sins was a natural response. By the sin-offering, the Israelites recognized that they did not deserve the blessings of the harvest because of their sins, and they sought forgiveness for those sins. Normally a sin-offering in behalf of the whole congregation was to consist of a bull (see comments on Lev. 4:13-14 in MESSAGE 2) However, provision had been made for allowing a less expensive offering when other expensive offerings were offered at the same time (see comments on Lev. 8:18 in MESSAGE 10, on Lev. 12:6,8 in MESSAGE 15, on Lev. 14:21-23 in MESSAGE 17, and on Lev. 16:3 in MESSAGE 20). Therefore, a male goat was specified for the sin-offering on this occasion.

and two male-lambs a year old as a slaughter-offering of peace-offerings.

A fifth offering to be secured in advance was a slaughter-offering of peace-offerings. The name of that offering could be shortened to either "slaughter-offering" or "peace-offerings." It symbolized fellowship among Jehovah, His worshipers, and his ministers (see comments on Lev. 3:1 in MESSAGE 1 under the heading a slaughter-offering of peace offerings). That offering also was highly appropriate for the Feast of Weeks because harvest was a time that all Israelites shared in common and that drew them together in fellowship. A slaughter-offering could be from the herd or the flock. If it was from the flock, it could be a sheep or a goat. Whatever the animal, it could be a male or female of any age. A wide variety of animals was allowed so the offering could be afforded by any Israelite (see comments on Lev. 3:2,7,12 in MESSAGE 1). For this slaughter-offering for the nation, two male lambs were specified, which doubled the number of animals but provided for neither the most expensive nor the least expensive

possibility because of a number of other offerings were to be offered at the same time.

Verse 20. And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the first-fruits as a wave-offering before Jehovah.

When the day came for all of these offerings to be presented to Jehovah, the priest was to wave over the altar “them with the bread of the first-fruits.” “Them” must refer to the offering that had just been mentioned, which was the slaughter-offering. A normal part of slaughter-offerings was waving the breast and the right front quarter over the altar, after which they were given to the priests for their support. This verse seems to clearly mean that the priest was to wave those portions of the slaughter-offering over the altar as a sign they were given to God and then assigned to the priests for his support (see comments on Lev. 7:31-36 in MESSAGE 9).

Those parts of the slaughter-offerings were to be waved over the altar along with “the bread of the first-fruits.” That expression is new, but it obviously was a descriptive term for the “wave-loaves” described in verse 17. The first-fruits offering also was to be waved over the altar and then given to the priests.

The handling of the blood, the fat, and the meat portions of the offerings that were roasted on the altar are not described in this passage because it was understood that they would be carried out in the usual manner.

Verse 21. And on the same day you shall make a proclamation, and you must hold a holy assembly. You must not do any occupational work. It is a statute for an age in all your dwellings through your generations.

And on the same day you shall make a proclamation, and you must hold a holy assembly. This statement comes to the main point of this MESSAGE. A holy assembly was to be held on the same day that the first-fruits offering was to be brought to the altar and the fire-offerings carried out (see comments on Lev. 23:2 in MESSAGE 30 under the heading in which you must call holy

assemblies). According to Exodus 23:16 all males in the nation were commanded to be a part of that holy assembly. It was to be an inspiring gathering, from which each man would return to his fields with great expectation of gathering in an abundant wheat harvest.

You must not do any occupational work. The day was also to be a sabbath (see comments on Lev. 16:31 in MESSAGE 20 under the heading a sabbath of a sabbath it must be to you, and you shall afflict yourselves and on Lev. 19:3 in MESSAGE 23 under the heading A man must fear his mother and his father, and you must keep My sabbaths). It was to be a time off from work to show they depended on God to be with them as they returned home to begin the hard work of bringing in the harvest.

It is a statute for an age in all your dwellings through your generations.

These instructions were a statute to be observed on and on into the indefinite future by generation after generation. This now familiar statement, left open the possibility that at sometime in the future Jehovah might change the instructions and cancel the celebration, which He did in Jesus (see comments on Lev. 3:17 in MESSAGE 1).

- B. Reminder of the ordinance concerning providing for the poor at harvest time (23:22)

Verses 22. And in harvesting the harvest of your land, you must not complete the corner of your field, and in your harvesting you must not gather the gleanings after your harvest. You must leave them for the poor and for the sojourner. I am Jehovah your God.

When the Israelites returned to their fields after this day of celebration and worship, they were to remember to provide for the poor. After recognizing that God provided for their needs, they needed to remember to provide for others who were not so fortunate. This verse is a reminder of the civil ordinance that had been given in Leviticus 19:9-10. The Israelites were not to harvest completely their grain crops or their grape crops. In

this MESSAGE, Jehovah mentioned only the grain harvest because this whole MESSAGE deals with thanking God for their wheat harvest. One way they could thank Him was by being thoughtful and generous to those who did not have fields to harvest. The land owner was to leave the corners of his field

uncut and not go back to pick up the gleanings that his workers dropped. He was to allow the poor and the sojourners to gather them (see Lev. 19:9-10 in MESSAGE 23).

Application

In all societies, agricultural, pastoral and industrial, the physical provisions and possessions that come to individuals are all gifts from God. People tend to believe that their successes and earnings are solely the result of their own efforts, but truthfully God has more to do with our wealth than we do. He created the earth for us to use. He gives and sustains life in every one of us. He gives us health and strength to work. He places us in locations and situations that give us opportunities to learn and to succeed. While our own work is extremely important, God's provisions for us are paramount in determining what happens in our lives. The person who recognizes God's providence in his or her life is wise and best able to receive and use what God provides to him. Even in complex modern societies, every Christian should see the hand of God in everything he has and thank Him for it all.

Gatherings of Christians should express gratitude to God for all the physical bounties of their nation, and families and individuals should take time each day to give God thanks for their blessings. Those expressions of gratitude should be more extensive than just a few moments with a bowed head. They also should include days reserved for ceasing work and taking time to worship and serve God. The forms of worship through which Christians express that gratitude are different from the forms of worship through which the ancient Israelites expressed it, but the spirit of that worship should be identical. Expressions of gratitude should go on throughout our lives and into generation after generation. God deserves it, and we need it.