**Exodus 34:18-26**

[*https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/exod/exod-34/exodus-3418-26/*](https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/exod/exod-34/exodus-3418-26/)

*Having stated the types of worship the Israelites were to stay away from, the LORD outlines the requirements of proper worship. They are a restatement of some of the items given in the Law of the Covenant in Chapter 23.*

The first item mentioned is that the people were to*observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread*. This was first described in [Exodus 12:15 – 20](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+12.15+%E2%80%93+20&t=NASB95) and later in [Exodus 23:15](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+23.15&t=NASB95). As a reminder, the LORD stated that *for seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in the month of Abib you came out of Egypt*. This feast was to occur *in the month of Abib*, which was in March-April in the solar calendar. This feast was to remind the Israelites that it was the LORD Who brought them out from slavery in Egypt. He was their Deliverer, not some other god. The fact was that in only a matter of days from having seen God’s deliverance, the people fashioned a golden calf and said of it, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt” ([Exodus 32:4](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+32.4&t=NASB95)). This might explain why this annual festival of remembrance comes first in the list.

The second principle repeated the law concerning the firstborn found in [Exodus 13:12](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+13.12&t=NASB95) and [Exodus 22:29f](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+22.29f&t=NASB95). The LORD stated here that *the first offspring from every womb belongs to Me, and all your male livestock, the first offspring from cattle and sheep*. *Every* *womb* included humans and livestock alike. This is because all of the human and animal firstborn of Israel were spared from death in the tenth plague ([Exodus 12:29-30](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+12.29-30&t=NASB95)). Whereas pagan religions included human sacrifice, in God’s economy firstborn humans were redeemed.

To transfer ownership of the firstborn to the LORD, the people were to *redeem with a lamb the first offspring from a donkey*. The word *redeem* has the root meaning of transferring ownership from one to another through some kind of payment. Donkeys were considered ceremonially unclean ([Leviticus 11:2 – 4](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Leviticus+11.2+%E2%80%93+4&t=NASB95)) and therefore unfit to use as a sacrifice. They could, however, be redeemed. To redeem a firstborn donkey, one was to use a lamb for the sacrifice. In an extreme and rare situation, *if you do not redeem it, then you shall break its neck*. Though unclean, donkeys were valuable in an agricultural society, so killing one would not be something that would be done frequently. This restates the same law as in [Exodus 13:13](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+13.13&t=NASB95).

Not only were the firstborn livestock to be redeemed, but also the people were required to *redeem all the firstborn of your sons*. The LORD stated that these firstborn sons were not to *appear before Me empty-handed*. To go *empty*–*handed* into the presence of the LORD was an act of ungratefulness. The LORD had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, and to come before Him without an offering would show a lack of thanksgiving and respect for their Deliverer. This summarized the statement in v. 19 that *the first offspring from every womb belongs to Me.*This redemption is in contrast to human sacrifice which was common in pagan religions. It was a picture of the redemption Jesus would provide for all peoples as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world ([John 1:29](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+1.29&t=NASB95),[36](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+1.36&t=NASB95" \t "BLB_NW)).

*In verse 21, the LORD restated the law of the S*abbath rest ([Exodus 16:23](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+16.23&t=NASB95), [20:8](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+20.8&t=NASB95); [30:14ff](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+30.14ff&t=NASB95)). This provides a weekly reminder that God is the Creator, who created the heavens and earth and rested on the seventh day. He told them that they *shall work six days, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during plowing time and harvest you shall rest*(v. 21). This addition regarding *plowing and harvest* is placed here because of what follows: the agricultural feasts.

The second feast mentioned here was associated with agriculture—*the Feast of Weeks*(v. 22). It was to be celebrated with *the first fruits of the wheat harvest*, which was in the late spring at the beginning of the harvesting of the crops, including wheat. The *Feast* *of* *Weeks* was called the “Feast of Harvest” in [Exodus 23:16](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+23.16&t=NASB95). In the New Testament, it was called the “Feast of Pentecost” because it was celebrated fifty days after Passover ([Acts 2:1](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+2.1&t=NASB95), [20:16](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Acts+20.16&t=NASB95); [1 Corinthians 16:8](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Corinthians+16.8&t=NASB95)). “Pentecost” was from the Greek meaning “fifty.”

The third feast to be celebrated was *the Feast of Ingathering* which occurred *at the turn of the year*, or in early autumn (September/October). The crops of summer (grapes, olives, etc.) were harvested at this time. It was also called the “Feast of Tabernacles” or the “Feast of Booths” ([Leviticus 23:33 – 36](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Leviticus+23.33+%E2%80%93+36&t=NASB95); [Deuteronomy 16:13 – 15](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Deuteronomy+16.13+%E2%80%93+15&t=NASB95); [31:10](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Deuteronomy+31.10&t=NASB95); [John 7:2](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=John+7.2&t=NASB95)). Each of these feasts were an opportunity for the people to remember who they were, and their covenant with God. They had already shown that their memory of God’s goodness and deliverance couldn’t last for forty days.

Verse 23 contains a summary of the LORD’s instructions about the feasts. He stated that *three times a year all your males are to appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel*. The feasts that all male Israelites were required to attend were Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread (v. 18), the Feast of Weeks (see [Exodus 23:16](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+23.16&t=NASB95)), and the Feast of Ingathering (see [Exodus 23:16](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+23.16&t=NASB95)). The *males*were commanded to appear at the feasts. However we know it became common for entire families to attend. Jesus’ parents’ custom was to both attend the Passover each year, and it was on such a trip to Jerusalem that Jesus was separated from them, where He amazed the teachers at the temple when he was only 12 years old. The troop of families and neighbors that traveled to Jerusalem was so large that Mary and Joseph didn’t miss Jesus for a full day after heading home ([Luke 2:41-50](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Luke+2.41-50&t=NASB95)).

In return for faithfully observing the feasts, the LORD promised to *drive out nations before you* (v. 24). That is, the people currently inhabiting the Promised Land would be cast out and would not bother Israel any more. Also, He would *enlarge*their*borders*. There would be plenty of land with which the people could prosper. Finally, the LORD could ensure that *no man shall covet your land*. The people around them could not and would not be able to conquer the Promised Land and take it away from the LORD’s covenant people.

All of this was promised by the LORD on the condition that the people*go up three times a year to appear before the Lord your God*. That is, the LORD would be faithful to protect them in the Promised Land if they were faithful to go to the place of worship (initially Shiloh, eventually Jerusalem) for the three feasts discussed in this passage—Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Ingathering. The feasts reminded the people that it was the LORD Who provided for all their needs as well as protected them from all of their enemies.

The requirement to periodically appear with an *offering* before their covenant Suzerain God was common among the ancient Near Eastern nations. In choosing the Suzerain Vassal treaty format, God chose a common and familiar format in that era within which to communicate to His people. For example, in some Hittite treaty documents, the vassal (or lesser) king was required to travel periodically to the suzerain (the ruler or the greater) king in order to reaffirm his loyalty. This included paying his annual tribute. In Exodus, the vassal is not a king, but an entire nation named “Israel.” The vassals are the individual citizens of Israel. Every adult male is a sovereign. This is because God set up Israel as a self-governing nation, where God reigned as a benevolent Suzerain seeking the best interest of the people.

There is no tyrant king seeking to expand his own power through extraction and exploitation. Each Israelite male head of household is a sovereign over his own family, with stewardship responsibility to love, provide for, nurture, and protect his family ([Deuteronomy 6:4-7](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Deuteronomy+6.4-7&t=NASB95)). God does not allow exploitation or abuse under His covenant laws. The suzerain is Yahweh, the one who chose His own vassals (Israel) to be in a covenant relationship with Him ([Exodus 19:4-6](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+19.4-6&t=NASB95)). He is the monarch, who makes the laws, and reigns as king. However, God delegated the judicial function to the people, to judge among themselves ([Deuteronomy 16:18](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Deuteronomy+16.18&t=NASB95)).

Thus, Yahweh required the self-governing sovereigns of Israel to appear before Him three times a year to fellowship with Him and with one another.

They were to remember their covenant and give thanks to Him for all His provisions. As opposed to tyrant kings that required profit from their vassal’s productivity via tribute, Israel’s Suzerain God’s demand was that each person do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with their God ([Micah 6:8](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Micah+6.8&t=NASB95)). To love God is to love others, under God’s covenant.

These feasts are both a remembrance as well as an opportunity for national unity and fellowship, to enjoy neighborly harmony. Most of the sacrifices subsequently became “barbecue” and went either to support the Levites or to support feasting among the families. It was therefore both a remembrance as well as a practical application of communal harmony. It was similar to modern celebrations of national holidays, such as a nation’s Independence Day. In Israel’s case, they were to remember their independence from slavery to Egypt by the mighty hand of their Suzerain God. It was this God who decreed their laws, which were designed to create a culture of mutual respect, love and service, resulting in communal harmony, security and productivity. If they obeyed, they would have the natural blessing that stems from such mutual cooperation, in addition to God’s added divine blessing.

Three other commands that were in the Law of the Covenant in chapter 23 were repeated here:

*You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread, nor is the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover to be left over until morning* (v. 25). This was first seen in [Exodus 23:18](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+23.18&t=NASB95). Leaven in the Passover represented impurity and sin ([Matthew 16:6 – 12](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+16.6+%E2%80%93+12&t=NASB95); [Luke 12:1](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Luke+12.1&t=NASB95); [1 Corinthians 5:4 – 8](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Corinthians+5.4+%E2%80%93+8&t=NASB95)). Therefore there was to be no *leavened bread* eaten or offered during Passover. This was also a remembrance of leaving Egypt in haste, with the blessing of the Egyptians. As recorded in [Exodus 12:33-34](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+12.33-34&t=NASB95): “The Egyptians urged the people, to send them out of the land in haste, for they said, ‘We will all be dead.’ So the people took their dough before it was leavened, with their kneading bowls bound up in the clothes on their shoulders.” The Israelites did not have time for their bread to rise, because they packed up and left early.

The *sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover*was not to be *left over until morning.*It was all to be eaten that night or burned. This was a remembrance of the requirement for the first Passover meal, which was eaten in haste. The Israelites left Egypt the morning after the Passover. As recorded in [Exodus 12:10-11](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+12.10-11&t=NASB95), part of Moses’ instructions to the people for the first Passover meal: “And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire. Now you shall eat it in this manner: with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste—it is the LORD’S Passover.”

*You shall bring the very first of the first fruits of your soil into the house of the Lord your God* (v. 26). This was first commanded in [Exodus 23:19](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+23.19&t=NASB95). The *first fruits*represents the first part of the crop. The principle is that generosity is to come from the first part of what is earned. If you only give what is left over, there usually isn’t any left to give. The principle of *first fruits*runs throughout scripture. Jesus is called the *first fruits of those who are asleep,*meaning Jesus was the first to be resurrected from the dead with a new body that would never again see death ([1 Corinthians 15:20](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Corinthians+15.20&t=NASB95)). James called those who had believed in Jesus a sort of “first fruits” among God’s creatures, those who were among the first to be born again ([James 1:18](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=James+1.18&t=NASB95)). Paul told the believers in Corinth to honor this principle by setting aside on the first day of the week an amount for an offering for Paul to collect to help the Jewish believers suffering persecution in Jerusalem ([1 Corinthians 16:2-3](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Corinthians+16.2-3&t=NASB95)).

*You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk* (v. 26). This was first stated in [Exodus 23:19](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+23.19&t=NASB95). This was likely prohibited because it was a pagan practice, and the LORD wanted no hint of idolatry or paganism in the worship of Him.

**Biblical Text:**

**18“You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in the month of Abib you came out of Egypt.**

**19“The first offspring from every womb belongs to Me, and all your male livestock, the first offspring from cattle and sheep. 20You shall redeem with a lamb the first offspring from a donkey; and if you do not redeem *it*, then you shall break its neck. You shall redeem all the firstborn of your sons. None shall appear before Me empty-handed.**

**21“You shall work six days, but on the seventh day you shall rest; *even* during plowing time and harvest you shall rest. 22You shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks, *that is*, the first fruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year. 23Three times a year all your males are to appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel. 24For I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your borders, and no man shall covet your land when you go up three times a year to appear before the Lord your God.**

**25“You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread, nor is the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover to be left over until morning.**

**26“You shall bring the very first of the first fruits of your soil into the house of the Lord your God.**

“**You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.”**