

May 2017

Frank W. Nelte

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN "FEASTS" AND "HOLY DAYS"

Many people in God's Church don't really understand the distinction between Feasts and Holy Days. And exactly where does the Passover fit into that picture? You just have to consider how many people, including many ministers, will freely speak about "The Feast of Trumpets", to get some idea regarding how prevalent and widespread this lack of understanding actually is. **There is no such thing as "the Feast of Trumpets"**, and nowhere does the Bible ever imply that the Day of Trumpets is supposed to be "a Feast". Yet year after year people continue to merrily speak about "the Feast of Trumpets".

It just goes to show how difficult it is to unlearn error. So let's try to sort out this confusion once and for all.

ALL OF GOD'S DAYS

In the Bible we see that God has identified **three different categories of days** for religious purposes. To identify these three categories of days God has used **two different Hebrew words**. One of these Hebrew words is used to identify one category of days. The other Hebrew word is used to identify the other two categories of days.

Now the way God has used the other Hebrew word to identify two separate categories of days is as follows: When this other Hebrew word is used on its own, then it identifies one category of days, and when this other Hebrew word is used with the adjective for "holy", then it identifies a different category of days.

In this way God has used two different Hebrew words to identify three different categories of days that God Himself has instituted. Shortly we'll look at these words in detail. But for now let's briefly consider something about the religious days in the pagan religions in biblical times.

THE ANCIENT PAGAN DAYS

The pagan religions also had certain religious days that were important to them. On different religious days they might do different things; e.g. feast on some days, and perhaps fast on other days, enact certain rituals on certain days, etc. But these distinctions were not always reflected in the words used to describe or to identify these different religiously observed days. That's because those religions did not group their religious days into different categories of days.

For example:

In **biblical Greek** there was **just one word** that could be used to identify all three categories of religious days of the Hebrew Old Testament teachings.

So if you were a writer of one of the books of the New Testament (i.e. Paul or Matthew or John or Peter, etc.) and you wanted to speak about the three different categories of religious days referenced in the Old

Testament Hebrew text, then you were restricted to using the one and only Greek word available to you for all three distinct categories of days.

The Greek mentality in New Testament times didn't grasp that the religious days of the Old Testament were grouped into three distinct categories, and therefore they could not all be correctly identified by the same Greek word. To put this in very plain language:

It was impossible to correctly describe in the Greek language of the New Testament certain Old Testament religious days! It couldn't be done! It was impossible to translate the distinctions between these three categories of days correctly into Greek without becoming extremely verbose.

If you wanted to refer to "category 1" days in Greek, then you used the one available Greek word.

If you wanted to refer to "category 2" days in Greek, then you also used the same one available Greek word.

If you wanted to refer to "category 3" days in Greek, then you also used the same one available Greek word.

So where Old Testament Hebrew draws clear distinctions between "category 1" and "category 2" and "category 3" days, in biblical Greek all three categories were lumped together as if they were the same thing. That's what happened when the New Testament writers only had one word available to refer to three distinct categories of days in the Greek language of the New Testament.

The writers of the New Testament were in effect **forced to mistranslate** some of these Hebrew categories of days into Greek. They had no other choice.

Can you recognize the problem?

The problem is this: When you now come along and read the Greek text of the New Testament, and you see this one Greek word used, then you must figure out whether that is supposed to refer to a "category 1" or a "category 2" or a "category 3" day. We need the Old Testament to understand certain references in the New Testament.

The literal meaning of this one Greek word has nothing to do with this issue! It would be **a huge mistake** to reason: since I know that this Greek word means "feast", therefore **this must be a reference to "a FEAST day"**! When this Greek word is of necessity the only word used to translate three different categories of religious days, only one of which is "a feast day", then we cannot possibly assume one answer and reject the other two possible answers without closer examination.

So in this situation we have to go back to the Old Testament Hebrew, and then determine which category of days is being referenced in the specific New Testament Greek language passage we are evaluating.

In this situation the literal meaning of the Greek word in question is immaterial! What is important is the specific category of days, in terms of the Hebrew text, that the New Testament writer was speaking about when he used this one and only available Greek word.

Any attempt to argue from the literal meaning of the Greek word in question is destined to reach wrong conclusions some of the time, simply because such arguments ignore the undesirable restriction which the one available Greek word placed on the writers of the Greek language New

Testament books.

A TRAIL OF CONFUSION

The Israelites spoke Hebrew at the time of Moses. So when God spelled out these three categories of days by using two different Hebrew words, then the intended meanings were clear at that time. The intended meanings were still clear all the way down to the time of Ezra, roughly 1000 years after Moses. Ezra, a High Priest, was fluent in both Hebrew and Aramaic, the language of Babylon.

But by Ezra's time the Jews in general who had returned from the Babylonian captivity had stopped using the Hebrew language as their daily language. Instead, the Jews at that time, all of whom had been born during the Babylonian captivity, had switched to using Aramaic as their "mother tongue", as their day-to-day language. Already at the time of Ezra some of the Jews could no longer fully understand Hebrew.

Hebrew had been relegated to being the language for religious customs and services. Hebrew had become part of the professional expertise for the priests and the Levites.

This situation was in fact later in the Middle Ages paralleled in Europe, when the common people in Europe spoke dialects of English or German or Dutch or French, etc., in their daily lives, while at the same time their own clergy spoke Latin and conducted all church services in Latin. Daily lives were conducted in one language, and religious practices were conducted in a different language, in Latin. Latin was also the language of the educated classes in Europe at that time.

In Europe this situation of two different languages being used contemporaneously for two different areas of life continued for a number of centuries. And amongst the Jews who had returned from the Babylonian captivity this same type of situation also continued for a number of centuries.

This situation was in fact very much in existence during Jesus Christ's ministry, when the common people no longer spoke Hebrew, while the religiously educated classes (the scribes and the Pharisees and the Sadducees) still spoke Hebrew when dealing with religion. And so Jesus Christ conducted His ministry in the Aramaic language, the language which the common people could readily understand.

Already before the start of the New Testament period translations of various Old Testament books into Greek (and also into Aramaic) had started to appear. While the story about the Greek LXX translation being made by 72 scholars from the 12 tribes is a complete fabrication with not a shred of truth in it, various Old Testament books began to be translated at various times into Greek by Greek-speaking Jews, who wanted to see their own religious writings preserved in the Greek language. Centuries later the Catholic scholar Origen compiled such translations into what we today know as the LXX version of the Old Testament.

Now here is the point:

Whereas in the Hebrew Old Testament the three different categories of days are identified by using two different Hebrew words, and adding the word for "holy" to one of those two words to establish a distinction, the Greek translations all used the one and only Greek word available to them to refer to all three categories of days.

So the Greek language LXX translation erased the distinction between these three categories of days!

The Greek language translations of the books of the Old Testament were not made primarily for Greeks! Those translations were made primarily for Jews who happened to be Greek-speaking. Many Jews outside of Palestine in New Testament times only knew the Old Testament in Greek. Those Jews no longer understood Hebrew.

We see a sampling of such Greek-speaking Jews being referenced in Acts 2:6-11. A number of the geographic areas identified in these six verses were Greek-speaking areas. Greek was after all the lingua franca of the New Testament period. And that is also one of the reasons why the New Testament was then written in Greek ... it was the most widely spoken language at that time.

For all of these Greek-speaking Jews the distinctions between these three categories of days became obscured, in the same way that **those three categories have always been obscured for most of the people in God's Church in this present age.**

Later, around 400 A.D., Jerome translated the Bible into Latin. Now unlike Greek, Latin actually had two different words available to identify at least two different categories of days. So Jerome could theoretically have consistently translated the one Hebrew word with the one Latin word, and then consistently translated the second Hebrew word with the second Latin word.

But Jerome didn't do that!

Instead, Jerome sometimes used the first Latin word to translate the first Hebrew word, and sometimes to translate the second Hebrew word. And then Jerome sometimes used the second Latin word to translate the first Hebrew word, and sometimes to translate the second Hebrew word.

In this way Jerome ensured that **total confusion about this matter would prevail!** Jerome's indiscriminate way of translating the two Hebrew words into Latin ensured that these Hebrew words would continue to be falsely viewed as synonymous.

When the English language translators then came along, from Wycliffe down to the King James Version and then down to modern times, they saw the one Greek word in the Greek versions, and they also saw the quite arbitrary and inconsistent Latin translations of the two Old Testament Hebrew words. They also saw that **the Jews themselves have blurred the distinction between the two Hebrew words.**

And so the English language translators perpetuated the false idea that the two Hebrew words basically refer to the same thing anyway. And it never even occurred to them that back in the days of Moses God had in fact spelled out some very clear distinctions for these different categories of days.

THE TECHNICAL DETAILS

We'll consider the Hebrew words in more detail shortly. But here are a few pertinent facts.

HEBREW WORDS:

CHAG = a feast, feasting, a festival

MOW'ED = a gathering, an assembly

GREEK WORD:

HEORTE = used to translate "chag" and also "mow'ed". But "heorte" itself basically means "feast". It is a suitable translation of "chag", but it is not a suitable translation of "mow'ed".

LATIN WORDS:

FERIAE = used to translate "chag" and also "mow'ed"

SOLLEMNITAS = used to translate "chag" and also "mow'ed"

ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS:

They freely **translate both "chag" and "mow'ed" as "FEAST/S"**.

The Latin FERIAE refers to festive occasions; it could thus be a suitable Latin translation for **"chag"**.

The Latin SOLLEMNITAS is the root of our words "solemn" and "solemnity", and it refers to "solemn days". This word could perhaps be used to translate **"mow'ed"** into Latin, although the Latin word "sollemnitas" implies a somber and solemn atmosphere that is not really expressed in the Hebrew word "mow'ed". The Latin word makes things far more "solemn" than is intended in the Hebrew. And the English expression **"our solemn feast day"** is inappropriate and misleading, because God has not said anything at all about "solemn" for the "feast" days, and therefore this expression should not be used in our singing! The idea of "solemn" applying to God's feasts comes from the Catholic Church via the Vulgate Translation.

The point is: it was theoretically possible to establish in Latin a distinction between two categories of days by consistently translating one Hebrew word with "feriae" and then consistently translating the other Hebrew word with "sollemnitas". But that didn't happen, as already mentioned earlier.

Before the Hebrew language was revived a couple of centuries ago, it had been a dead language for well over 1000 years, during which time it was not spoken by any people as their daily language. Now when Origen in the 230's to 250's A.D. produced his Hexapla, which was the Old Testament in six parallel columns, he used the Secunda (i.e. column II) to record **the Old Testament Hebrew text transliterated into Greek characters**. That's like us transliterating the Hebrew words "chag" and "mow'ed" into our alphabet.

Now since the Greek alphabet includes vowels, it meant that Origen was preserving in Greek letters the pronunciation of Hebrew words, as they were being pronounced by Jewish religious scholars in the third century A.D.

Modern Hebrew scholars and authorities have in fact relied on the Secunda for the correct pronunciation of many questionable Hebrew words. Very, very few people in God's Church are aware of this reliance by Hebrew scholars on records preserved by the Catholic Church for certain questionable pronunciations of Hebrew words.

This (relying on the Secunda) also applies to scholars who have produced Hebrew dictionaries and lexicons. In a few instances such scholars were forced to rely on records preserved by the Catholic Church to tell them how certain Hebrew words should be understood.

Let's now see how the highly regarded **Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon (BDB)** deals with our two Hebrew words:

For "mow'ed" BDB says:

"1) appointed place, appointed time, meeting

1a) appointed time

1a1) appointed time (general)

1a2) **sacred season, set feast, appointed season**

1b) appointed meeting

1c) **appointed place**

1d) appointed sign or signal

1e) tent of meeting" (end of BDB quotation)

The point is that here **BDB is partly wrong!** Some of the definitions provided are correct and others are wrong, and those wrong ones display a lack of understanding the distinctions God made for these two Hebrew words.

Mow'ed is not "a set feast"; the word mow'ed by itself never means "a feast". And "mow'ed" is also not "an appointed place". The word "mow'ed" by itself never refers to a place or a location!

Of all the feast days there are four days that are at the same time also "mow'ed days". The only reason **those four "mow'ed" days** are feast days is because **each one of them is also identified by the word "chag"**.

BDB has accepted the blurring between the two words "chag" and "mow'ed", because the Jews themselves have blurred the distinctions between these two words.

For "chag" BDB says:

1) festival, feast, festival-gathering, pilgrim-feast

1a) feast

1b) **festival sacrifice**

Here BDB is also partly wrong!

The word "chag" does not mean "festival sacrifice".

Can you understand what this highly respected Hebrew-English Lexicon has done? They have done two things for both words:

Firstly, they have looked at the actual meaning of each word. And that they did correctly. So they show that "mow'ed" means "an appointed meeting or assembly". And they show that "chag" means "a feast or festival". And they should have restricted their definitions to these correct meanings. But they didn't do that.

So, **secondly**, in addition to giving the correct meanings for these two words, BDB then also looked at all the contexts in which these words are used. It's fine to look at those contexts. But the mistake BDB then

made is that they accepted the contexts as a part of the meanings for these two words. **That is wrong!**

Because for us this involves a strange language with a strange alphabet (i.e. Hebrew), it is easy for us to not grasp their mistake. So let me give you an analogy that illustrates what BDB has done.

Let's say I write a book in English, and people who speak a totally different language (Hindi, Zulu, Chinese, etc.) decide to study my book to learn English. In the book I repeatedly use the word "meeting". In one place I say: "we'll have **a meeting on the beach**"; and I also say: "next week we will have **a meeting in Los Angeles**". I also use the words "feast" and "festival" in the following expressions: "when we get together next month **for a feast we will have a BBQ**", and "we expect all of you to **travel to our festival in Los Angeles**".

These are simple sentences for you to understand. But for the stranger with perhaps even a totally different set of written characters, and who has never before heard or read a word of English, and who is trying to understand the meaning of the strange English words "meeting" and "feast/festival" it may be a bit confusing.

What BDB in analogy has done is deduce that "meeting" means "getting together" and "assembling". But then they went further and said that the word "meeting" can also refer to **"the beach"** and to **"traveling to Los Angeles"**. And for the word "feast" they recognized that it means "a feast". That's right. But then they went further and said that the word "feast" can also refer to **"a BBQ"**.

Okay, so my analogy falls a little short. But can you grasp what BDB has done in defining the words "chag" and "mow'ed"? They inferred that the contexts in which these words are used are supposedly a part of the meaning of these words ... like claiming that "the beach" and "a BBQ" and "Los Angeles" are a part of the definitions in the above analogy.

The meaning of a word is one thing, and the context in which that word is used is something else. They are not the same thing.

With most other words, dictionaries and lexicons don't have this problem. The reason they have this problem for the words "mow'ed" and "chag" is because the ancient Greek and Latin translations of the Old Testament blurred the distinctions between these two words, and then interpreted them as more or less synonymous. And the Jews themselves have gone along with the blending of the meanings of "mow'ed" and "chag".

You can think this through for yourself. My comments regarding BDB also apply to many other dictionaries for biblical languages. Here is a key you should keep in mind:

When some people do not understand an instruction correctly, then they are also not capable of describing or defining that instruction correctly to other people. It is a case of the blind trying to lead the blind.

So for BDB's definitions for "mow'ed":

"Mow'ed" does **not** mean "an appointed place"! Instructions for how to observe a mow'ed may include references to "an appointed place", but those references don't expand the meaning of mow'ed. That's like: a feast may include a BBQ, but that doesn't expand the meaning of the word "feast" to now also mean "BBQ".

"Mow'ed" does **not** mean "an appointed time"! Instructions for a mow'ed may include references to "an appointed time", but those references don't affect the actual meaning of mow'ed. That's like: a meeting

may be planned for a Wednesday evening, but these plans don't expand the meaning of the word "meeting" to now also mean "Wednesday".

"Mow'ed" does **not** mean "an appointed sign or signal"! A mow'ed may be used as a sign to identify something or someone, but that use does not affect the meaning of mow'ed. That's like: Sunday church observance may be used to identify a Catholic, but that doesn't mean that the word "Catholic" now also means "Sunday".

"Mow'ed" does **not** mean "tent of meeting"! If the word mow'ed is used together with the word for "tent", then it means "tent of meeting". But on its own, without the word for "tent", mow'ed simply does not mean "tent of meeting".

Can you understand what the authors of dictionaries and lexicons have done? They have in their books expanded the meanings of "chag" and "mow'ed" to include the contexts in which these two words are used. **That is a mistake!** The contexts in which "chag" and "mow'ed" are used do not alter or expand the actual meanings of these two words.

I have mentioned these things to try to help you understand the distinction between the actual meanings of the words "mow'ed" and "chag" on the one hand, and the list of supposed meanings that you can find in various highly esteemed dictionaries on the other hand. A major reason for why they have done this for these two Hebrew words is that the differences between these two words have been erased ever since the first Greek language translations were produced, with the Jews themselves no longer understanding the differences between these two words.

Used on its own the word "chag" means: a feast or festival.

Used on its own the word "mow'ed" means: a meeting or assembly.

With this background let's now look in more detail at these two Hebrew words and the three categories of days they identify.

THREE CATEGORIES OF RELIGIOUS DAYS

All three categories of days are mentioned in the first few verses of Leviticus 23.

Let's start with verse 2.

Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, *Concerning the feasts* (mow'ed) of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim *to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts* (mow'ed). (Leviticus 23:2)

The Hebrew word "**mow'ed**" **does not mean "feast"**! Mow'ed never means feast! This verse does not say anything whatsoever about "feasts"! We are dealing with a **blatant mistranslation!** We are in fact being misled right from the very start of this chapter!

Mow'ed is a noun that has been formed from the Hebrew verb "ya'ad". And ya'ad means: **to meet, to get together, to assemble**. But ya'ad does **not** mean: to feast. Ya'ad has nothing at all to do with feasting.

The noun mow'ed really means: **a meeting, a get-together, an assembly**. The expression "the tabernacle **of the congregation**" really reads "the tabernacle **of mow'ed**", and this could also be called

"the tabernacle of meeting" or "**the tabernacle of assembly**". After all, the verb "to congregate" means "to assemble, to gather together".

The Hebrew word translated as "convocation" in this verse is "miqra", and this word comes from a root word that means "to call" or "to proclaim", implying a loud voice. And "a convocation" refers to those who meet together in response to having been called, forming an assembly.

Of the 223 times the noun *mow'ed* is used in the Old Testament, it is used 127 times in the expression "the tabernacle of the congregation", or "the tent for those who have been called together".

The unambiguous focus of the word *mow'ed* is on assembling, on getting together. **Whether or not such getting together also involves "feasting" is a completely different issue.**

The word "convocation" refers a calling-together, an encounter, a meeting, etc. A "holy" convocation is a meeting that has been instituted by God and then designated as "holy" by God. **Note that not every "convocation" is necessarily "holy".**

A clearer and more appropriate way to translate verse 2 could be:

Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them: **the assemblies** of the LORD, which you shall call **holy meetings**, *even these are my assemblies*. (Leviticus 23:2, more appropriate translation)

To spell this out very plainly:

The introductory two verses of Leviticus chapter 23 say nothing whatsoever about feasts! Feasts are not the main focus of what is to follow. **The main focus** of what follows in the rest of this chapter **is on meetings**, on get-togethers, on assemblies that God has instituted for His people, some of which are then also designated as feasts.

So translations that read "set feasts" or "fixed feasts" or "appointed seasons" or "appointed festivals", etc. are all misleading! The focus is not at all on feasting or on festivals or on seasons. The focus is on days for meetings, days for getting together, days for assembling, whether or not feasting is involved as an added aspect.

Whether or not some of those meetings happen to be feasts is **not yet** indicated in the opening verses of this chapter. The details for the various get-togethers will be spelled out in the instructions that follow.

Leviticus 23:3 then identifies **the weekly Sabbath** as "a holy convocation". These words identify the weekly Sabbaths as God-commanded assemblies.

But **the Sabbath is not a feast**, and it has never been a feast! Claiming that the Sabbath is "a weekly feast" is foolish reasoning based on the gross mistranslation of *mow'ed* in the previous verse. **It is absurd to claim that the weekly Sabbath is supposed to be a feast.** That is not what God said, and that is not what God meant.

Here is a key we should keep in mind:

All of the days identified in this chapter are *mow'ed* days! All of them are meeting days, days for assembling!

That is exactly what verse 2 has told us. And that point is repeated in verse 4. And that is repeated one more time in the concluding statement of this chapter (i.e. in verse 44). Three times

God tells us in this chapter that He is giving us a list of mow'ed days, a list of days for meetings.

So Leviticus 23 does not give us a list of "feasts"! Leviticus 23 gives us a list of "days for meeting together", or a list of "days for assembling". **That is the purpose for this chapter.** In the process of listing all of "the days for assembling", we **then** see that God has divided all these "days for assembling" into three different categories of days, one of which categories happens to be "feast days".

Now some mow'ed days are at the same time also "holy". **We can have mow'ed days that are not holy, and we can have mow'ed days that are also holy.** And in addition to that, some mow'ed days can at the same time also be "feast days".

So mow'ed days can have either one or two added features. When the added feature happens to be that it is "a feast day", then the word mow'ed is usually dropped and replaced by the second Hebrew word "chag", which we will consider in more detail shortly. That dropping of the word mow'ed is because **the feasting feature is emphasized over the get-together feature for those particular days.**

When the added feature is "holy", then the word mow'ed is retained, because the focus on meeting together has been strengthened by the addition of the word "holy".

Here is verse 4.

These *are* **the feasts** (mow'ed) of the LORD, *even* **holy convocations**, which you shall proclaim **in their seasons** (mow'ed). (Leviticus 23:4)

Notice that here the word mow'ed is used twice: the first time it is **mistranslated** as "feasts" and the second time it is **mistranslated** as "seasons". It may seem logical or appropriate to us to translate mow'ed as "seasons". We have all been conditioned to accept this as a valid translation, but that is not really what mow'ed means. It means: assemblies, meetings, get-togethers. And that is not what "a season" is.

So verse 4 should read something like:

These *are* **the meetings** (mow'ed) of the LORD, *even* **holy assemblies**, which you shall proclaim **in their meetings** (mow'ed). (Leviticus 23:4)

You don't proclaim them "in their seasons" at all! That is, you don't say: now it is spring, so therefore we will now have the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost, because such a "proclamation" wouldn't tell you anything at all! And similarly you don't say: now it is fall (or autumn), so therefore we will now have Trumpets and Atonement and Tabernacles and the Last Great Day. Such a statement would also be meaningless.

Furthermore, **you cannot elevate "the season" above the position of the month in the yearly cycle.** So while Nisan must always be in the spring of the Northern Hemisphere, the people in the Southern Hemisphere will in fact always be keeping the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread in the fall (autumn) season.

So much for proclaiming these days "in their seasons"! That is simply not what God said or meant! In the context of viewing God's feasts and Holy Days for the Southern Hemisphere, don't try to elevate the season above the position of the month in the annual cycle.

No, what God was instructing in Leviticus 23:4 is that we are to proclaim these days "in the meetings set

aside for these days". So, for example, on the 15th Day of the 1st Month we are to proclaim something like "**Welcome, brethren, to the First Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread**". This is "proclaimed" to the people who attend services on that day; it is not proclaimed to people who don't attend services. It is proclaimed during the meetings on those days.

Leviticus 23:4 is not a reference in any way to "seasons". It is a reference to clearly state on each of these days exactly what is being observed. The messages on those days may deal with any valid subject of the speaker's choice; but **the actual occasion** that is being observed **must be clearly identified**. The occasion should be identified by name; that is what is to be "proclaimed" in that mow'ed, in that "meeting".

Let's continue with the next verse.

THE PASSOVER

In the fourteenth *day* of the first month at dusk (Hebrew "between the two evenings") *is* the LORD's Passover. (Leviticus 23:5)

In the previous verse we were told that this is a mow'ed, a meeting. So here are the relevant details for the Passover:

- 1) It is identified as a mow'ed, a meeting.
- 2) It is **not** called "**a feast**".
- 3) It is **not** called "**holy**".

So let's assign the label "**category 1 day**" to the Passover. Any other days that meet the same criteria (i.e. a mow'ed without being either a feast or holy) will then also be identified as "category 1 days".

Since we have selected mow'ed without additional features as "category 1", it makes sense to reserve "category 2" for mow'ed days that are also proclaimed to be "holy".

That leaves "category 3" for days that are identified as mow'ed days that are also "feast days".

So in plain terms, it might be helpful to think of the three categories of religious days as follows:

Category 1 days = mow'ed days with no extra qualifications.

Category 2 days = mow'ed days that are also "holy".

Category 3 days = mow'ed days that are also "feasts".

(We should note that there are 4 days in the year that are simultaneously Category 2 + Category 3 days. We'll come to that later.)

Let's continue with the next verse.

THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

And on the fifteenth day of the same month *is* **the feast** (chag) of unleavened bread unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread. (Leviticus 23:6)

Let's note:

This is the first place in this chapter where the word "chag" is used. The Feast of Unleavened Bread is here identified as a "chag" occasion. But it is **also** a mow'ed, i.e. it is an occasion when we are to gather together, and we are to do so for seven days. But in this case the mow'ed attribute takes second place to this being a "chag", "a feast".

The Hebrew word "**chag**" means: a feast in the sense that **it is a celebration**. It is to be a time of joy and rejoicing, typically with generous quantities of good food being available. And this time of joy and celebration is to last for seven days.

So it is correct to translate this Hebrew word "chag" as "feast"!

And, as indicated above, we'll assign the label "**category 3 days**" to the whole Feast of Unleavened Bread, to all seven days.

Let's continue in Leviticus 23.

HOLY DAYS

In **the first day** you shall have an **holy** convocation: you shall do no servile work therein. But you shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD seven days: in **the seventh day** *is* an **holy** convocation: you shall do no servile work *therein*. (Leviticus 23:7-8)

All the occasions in Leviticus 23 are identified as mow'ed occasions, as occasions for assembling. But, as we have seen, these seven days of Unleavened Bread are also identified as a "chag" celebration, a feast.

Now we come to some additional details. In this verse God identifies the 1st Day and also the 7th Day as "**holy** gatherings". This "holy" attribute distinguishes these mow'ed days from others that are not identified as "holy". So we commonly refer to this category of days as "Holy Days".

As already indicated above, we'll call these days "**category 2 days**".

Thus in the four verses of Leviticus 23:5-8 God has identified all three categories of days in the year that God wants us to observe in some form.

The three categories are as follows:

CATEGORY 1 DAYS:

Days in this category are simply identified as mow'ed days. Note that such days are **not really set apart from other days**. But they are identified for certain activities, which activities are enjoined on only

certain people, rather than being enjoined on all people.

Category 1 days are not identified as "holy", and so there are no restrictions regarding what activities (obviously in compliance with God's laws!) people may engage in on category 1 days.

To be clear: mow'ed days are identified as gathering days for certain activities, in addition to whatever else people may do on those days.

In practical terms: **The Passover is the only day in this "category 1" days in the year**, that has been enjoined by God on His people, but not necessarily on mankind as a whole. What this means is that unbaptized people are not sinning when they don't keep the Passover, because God did not enjoin Passover observance on them. In fact, God does not want any unrepentant person to even try to keep the Passover; and for such people to keep the Passover is at the risk of "eating and drinking damnation to themselves" (see 1 Corinthians 11:29).

To clarify the meaning of mow'ed:

I should mention that technically speaking the Church has also established "mow'ed days" for various congregations. I would, however, not really want to use the Hebrew word "mow'ed" to identify such days, lest some people attach undue significance to them. But, for example, a weekly Bible Study, a church social, a Spokesmen's Club meeting, a meeting for all interested members to plan activities for the upcoming year, etc., are technically all meetings or assemblies of some sort, sanctioned by the Church. And that is precisely what the Hebrew word "mow'ed" means ... occasions of assembling for some or other purpose, occasions when specific activities have been scheduled.

Obviously, none of these are commanded by God. And therefore I would not really want to apply the Hebrew word "mow'ed" to such occasions. I simply present this point to illustrate the correct meaning of "mow'ed".

Now of all the days listed in Leviticus chapter 23, the Passover is the only meeting (i.e. ordinary plain mow'ed which is neither holy nor a feast day) in this particular category enjoined by God on His people. This sets the Passover apart on its own from all other observances instituted by God.

CATEGORY 2 DAYS:

All the days in category 2 are **mow'ed days** that are also designated as "**holy**". This "holy" status sets these days apart from all other days in the year that are not holy. Some of the mow'ed days with the "holy" status may have the additional status of also being "feast days", while other mow'ed days with the "holy" status do not have that added "feast day" status.

Here are all the **mow'ed days** in the year that are **also "holy"** but they are **not** also at the same time "**feast days**".

- The Holy Day of **Trumpets**
- The Holy Day of **Atonement**
- The Holy Day of the **Last Great Day**
- The holy **Weekly Sabbath Days**

[There are **four other mow'ed days** that are **also "holy"** and at the same time **also "feast days"**. Shortly we'll consider those days more closely.]

All these holy mow'ed days are set apart by God for meetings, for getting together. Broadly speaking, the instructions that apply to the weekly Sabbath days also apply to these annual Holy Days, with in some cases different additional instructions for certain days.

Now by being set apart as "holy" these days are to be observed by all human beings. All the people who do not observe these seven days, plus the weekly Sabbath Days, are sinning! **It is a sin before God to not observe any day that God has set apart as "holy"!** This condition of sin for non-observance has nothing to do with whether or not people have ever been a part of God's Church. Non-observance of any day God has set apart as "holy" is sin, because it misses the mark that God has established.

CATEGORY 3 DAYS

There are **four** mow'ed days in the year that are **both holy and feast days**, meaning that these days are identified with the Hebrew word "chag". They are:

- The **First Day** of the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**
- The **Seventh Day** of the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**
- The one-day **Feast of Pentecost**
- The **First Day** of the **Feast of Tabernacles**

That leaves only **Days 2-6** of the Feast of **Unleavened Bread** and **Days 2-7** of the Feast of **Tabernacles** to still be identified. Here is how these days should be classified:

Days 2-6 of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and Days 2-7 of the Feast of Tabernacles are identical in classification. All 11 of these days are:

- 1) **mow'ed days** which are **not set apart as holy**; but they are intended for God's people to gather together;
- 2) **feast days** because they are all part of one of two 7-day Feasts (i.e. "chag" occasions), and **they are intended for rejoicing and for celebrating**.

This means that days Days 2-6 of Unleavened Bread and Days 2-7 of Tabernacles are available for activities that would not be acceptable for days that are designated as "holy". But **they are also intended to be days when God's people gather together**. Gathering together is the most prominent feature of any day identified with the word mow'ed. But such gathering together on those particular mow'ed days need not be in the form of a church service, though it certainly can be. **What form or format those particular gatherings take is an administrative decision, for which there is no particular biblically prescribed format.**

So here are all the annual days in the year that God has listed in Leviticus 23.

- 1) **PASSOVER** : This is a "**Category 1**" day, an ordinary mow'ed day with no added features for the day as a whole. The focus is purely on a very specific activity that "certain people" (i.e. baptized members of

God's Church) are to carry out (i.e. they are to keep the Passover).

2) **FIRST DAY OF THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD** : This is a "**Category 2**" + "**Category 3**" day, a mow'ed day that is **also holy, as well as being a feast day**. The focus for this day is on getting together for church services in an atmosphere of celebrating and rejoicing before God. This is truly a "holy feast day". It has the added feature of putting out leaven for all 7 days of this feast. [Comment: The expression "**holy** feast day" is correct and appropriate for us to use, while the expression "**solemn** feast day" is a counterfeit expression which we should not use. God did not designate any days as "solemn"; it was the Latin text that introduced this "solemn" feature.]

3) **DAYS 2-6 OF THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD** : These are "**Category 3**" days, but **without being "holy"**. The focus for these days is on rejoicing and celebrating before God, with the additional instructions from God to put out all leaven and to not eat leavened products. For these days God has delegated to the Church the authority to make administrative decisions regarding what activities (church services, etc.) should be planned. They are "feast days" which are not "holy".

4) **SEVENTH DAY OF THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD** : Everything that applies to the First Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread also applies to this Seventh Day of Unleavened Bread. It is a "**Category 2**" + "**Category 3**" day.

5) **THE FEAST OF PENTECOST** : Everything that applies to the First Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread also applies to the Feast of Pentecost, without the instructions pertaining to leaven. It is a "**Category 2**" + "**Category 3**" day.

6) **THE HOLY DAY OF TRUMPETS** : This is a "**Category 2**" day, a mow'ed day that is also holy. It is in the same category as the weekly Sabbath Day, a Holy Day **without being a feast**.

7) **THE HOLY DAY OF ATONEMENT** : This is also a "**Category 2**" day, to be observed just like Trumpets, but with the added feature that we are to fast on this day.

8) **FIRST DAY OF THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES** : This is a "**Category 2**" + "**Category 3**" day, a mow'ed day that is **also holy, as well as being a feast day**. The focus for this day is on getting together for church services in an atmosphere of celebrating and rejoicing before God. This is truly a "holy feast day". Basically, it is to be observed in the same manner as the First Day of Unleavened Bread, but without the instruction to put out and not eat leaven.

9) **DAYS 2-7 OF THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES** : These are "**Category 3**" days, but **without being "holy"**. The focus for these days is on rejoicing and celebrating before God, without additional instructions from God. For these days God has delegated to the Church the authority to make administrative decisions regarding what activities (church services, etc.) should be planned. They are "feast days" which are not "holy".

10) **THE LAST GREAT DAY** : This is a "**Category 2**" day, a mow'ed day that is also holy. It is in the same category as the weekly Sabbath Day, a Holy Day without being a feast day. The Last Great Day is not a feast any more than the Passover is a feast.

That sums up all the annual days in the year that God has identified for His people.

There are **3 "Feasts"** in the year (= Category 3 occasions)

- The 7-Day Feast of Unleavened Bread,

- The 1-Day Feast of Pentecost,
- The 7-Day Feast of Tabernacles.

There are **7 "Holy Days"** in the year (= Category 2 occasions)

- The 1st Day of Unleavened Bread,
- The 7th Day of Unleavened Bread,
- The Holy Day of Pentecost,
- The Holy Day of Trumpets,
- The Holy Day of Atonement,
- The 1st Day of Tabernacles,
- The Last Great Day.

There is **1 "commanded gathering for baptized members of God's Church"** which is neither a feast day nor is it holy (= Category 1 occasion)

- The Passover.

In addition to these annual days, God has also set apart as a Holy Day the weekly Sabbath Day, and man is instructed to "keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8).

One consequence of blurring the distinction between feasts and Holy Days affects God's instructions regarding the offerings we are to bring to God. But that is another subject, which is examined in detail in my article "WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT OFFERINGS?", and we need not discuss it here in this context.

A question that comes up is this:

If, as you say, all the days listed in Leviticus 23 are "days for assembling", does this not mean that we should also be getting together for the whole Feast of Unleavened Bread, just like we do for the Feast of Tabernacles?

The answer here is:

We can get together in our local church areas without necessarily having to go to feast sites in limited locations, as we do for example at the Feast of Tabernacles. For example, we get together on the weekly Sabbath days in our local areas, without making any pilgrimages to certain designated feast sites. And likewise, we also get together in our local areas for the one-day Feast of Pentecost, without traveling to designated feast sites.

So with the three feasts (Unleavened Bread, Pentecost and Tabernacles) it is really a case of administrative decisions by the Church that will determine where the Church will observe these feasts. It is up to the Church to determine which of these three feasts will be observed as pilgrimages to designated feast sites, and which of these will be observed in the local church areas. The Church can decide whether we "get together", or "assemble", in our local areas, or whether we get together at

pilgrimage feast sites.

Those are administrative decisions for the Church to make.

So it is acceptable to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread at some designated feast site for 7 days, and it is also acceptable to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread in our local church areas. Those are administrative decisions.

But also consider the following:

The instruction to "**put out**" leaven and **not** have leaven "**found in our houses**" for 7 days (see Exodus 12:19) implies to some degree that we are still there in our homes, but all the leaven has been put out; rather than implying that we have just "walked away from our leaven-filled homes" to some feast site ... only to return to our leaven-filled homes after those 7 days.

We are certainly not in the same situation as were the ancient Israelites, who walked away from their homes in Egypt. Those Israelites didn't actually clean and de-leaven their houses at all. They simply didn't take any leaven with them when they left. The leaven stayed behind in their houses, to which houses they never again returned.

But the actual instructions for keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread have **the feel of dwelling in our own de-leavened homes for those 7 days**. They don't have the feel of going to some accommodation at some feast site, which accommodation we don't own, and where we therefore then need to de-leaven that accommodation when we first arrive, before we can even start to observe this 7-day feast.

We surely shouldn't assume that some strange non-church-member people at that feast site have done all the de-leavening for us, since they don't even understand what de-leavening is all about. So **we would have to take responsibility for de-leavening any place we go to** for the Feast of Unleavened Bread before we can start observing those 7 days.

In other words, keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread at designated feast sites would require the following two things from us:

1) We must first **de-leaven our homes before we leave** for our trip to the feast site, because we will be coming back to those homes. Those de-leavened homes will then not be used by anyone while we are away at the feast site. They will stand empty during the Feast.

2) When we get to the feast site to our accommodation there, then we again have the responsibility to ensure that the place where we will stay for 7 days has been de-leavened. So **we must be prepared to do some more de-leavening** before the Feast of Unleavened Bread actually starts. This step is typically overlooked, and we assume that the non-church-member business people whose premises we rent have done an acceptable de-leavening for us. Such an assumption may or may not be justified?

My point is: while it is certainly acceptable to get together at feast sites for the whole Feast of Unleavened Bread, I do not believe that it is a requirement for us to go to feast sites away from our homes. Whether we observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread locally or at designated feast sites does not in any way affect **how** we are to observe this feast, and the activities that are acceptable for every one of those 7 days.

So much for this particular question.

To get back to our main subject for this article, I hope that this clarifies the distinctions between feasts

and Holy Days. And hopefully you will also understand why in the New Testament the Passover is **incorrectly** referred to as "a feast".

Frank W Nelte