

Sacred Time in West Semitic Festival Calendars and the Dating of Leviticus 23

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The Bible records several versions of the Israelite festival calendar, including accounts in Exod 23; 34; Lev 23; Num 28-9; Deut 16; and Ezek 45. The festivals, as depicted in the various texts, have many commonalities; however, there are also differences. Some of the often cited differences in the festival calendar texts include fixed dates versus dates based upon the harvest, the combination of two named rites into a larger ritual complex, the mention of simultaneous rites in different locations of the same text, and some festivals are named in one text and unnamed in others. Scholars have explored these similarities and differences arguing that the various calendars were written by different sources (authors/redactors) at different times in Israelite history. The current project provides a comparative analysis between Lev 23 and the second-millennium Akkadian multi-month festival calendar from Syria (Emar 446). After a review of each text and the contextual material, this study argues that Lev 23 preserves an early second-millennium West Semitic ritual tradition.

KEYWORDS: *sacred, ritual, Akkadian, Leviticus 23, Emar, Festival Calendar*

INTRODUCTION

The Bible records several versions of the Israelite festival calendar: in Exod 23 and 34, Lev 23, Num 28–29, Deut 16, and Ezek 45. In general the calendars include Passover/Pesach (פסח), the Feast of Unleavened Bread (חג המצות), Firstfruits (בכורים), the Feast of Weeks (שבועת), the Feast of Trumpets (also called Rosh Hashanah), the Day of Atonement (יום הכפרים), and the Feast of Tabernacles (סוכה) (Booths/Ingathering). But while the calendars share many features, they also have their distinctions—of which the most often cited concern the following:

- The festival dates: Some dates are fixed, while others vary according to agricultural conditions.
- The festival locations: Some festival calendars allude to offerings made at local or regional sanctuaries, while other texts point to offerings made at the Jerusalem Temple.
- The date of the New Year: Some festival texts appear to show the New Year in the spring and others place the New Year in the fall. Some allude to both.
- The festival timing: Many festivals are associated with the harvest, but some festivals appear to occur before the harvest is ripe.
- The festival names: Festivals are named in some texts and are unnamed in others.

Scholars account for these distinctions by proposing that several authors or redactors composed the calendars at different times in Israelite history.¹ Jan Wagenaar, in his 2005 work, *Origin and Transformation of the Ancient Israelite Festival Calendar*, examines the development of each festival calendar text and makes his case for a late authorship of Lev 23.

When studying the origins of this biblical text, Wagenaar finds it shares characteristics with the first-millennium Babylonian Akitu festival texts (a composite of four text fragments).² And based on his analysis, Wagenaar concludes these similarities point to priestly authorship during the exile (when Israel was in Babylon). Further, he argues that a postexilic priestly redactor added portions to the biblical narrative.

This study rebuts Wagenaar's conclusion that similarities with the first-millennium Akitu festival necessitate a late authorship or

1. For a discussion of recent scholarship see Jeffrey Stackert, "Leviticus," *OEBB* 1:573–81; T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (3d ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), 1–63.

2. Wagenaar argues that his study "intends to focus strictly on a comparison between the ancient Israelite and Neo-Babylonian festival calendars. The second-millennium Anatolian and North-West and East Semitic festival calendars from Hatti . . . , Ebla . . . , Mari . . . and Emar . . . will—with the sole exception of Ugarit—largely be ignored because of the distance in time and space between these cultures and the monarchies of Israel and Judah" (*Origin and Transformation of the Ancient Israelite Festival Calendar* [Harrassowitz Verlag: Wiesbaden, 2005], 6 n. 24). The exclusion of the analysis of comparative texts, because they may be earlier than the dating of Lev 23, creates a circular argument, i.e. Lev 23 is late because it is similar to the first-millennium Akitu text and any similarities with earlier texts are invalid because Lev 23 was written late. Conclusions from a comparative study should include an analysis of relevant texts before making an argument. Wagenaar's decision to exclude the study of earlier texts, creating a circular argument, weakens his overall argument.

redaction of Lev 23.³ We will demonstrate that four of the links he cites already existed between Lev 23 and a ritual text from the second millennium.⁴

REVIEW OF WAGENAAR AND CURRENT SCHOLARSHIP

Wagenaar depends on several pieces of evidence to reinforce his argument. Four of the most notable items are the apparent depictions of biannual New Year celebrations (one in the spring and another in the fall), the grouping of two named rites into a larger festival complex (Pesach and the Feast of Unleavened Bread), the presence of both named and unnamed festivals in the same text, and the descriptions of two festivals, celebrated on the same day, but recorded in different parts of the same text (Feast of Tabernacles and Feast of YHWH [הג יְהוָה]). To better understand Wagenaar's thesis, we will examine these four elements in greater detail.

Dual New Year Celebrations

The festival calendar in Lev 23 prescribes celebrations in the first and seventh months of the year. Julius Wellhausen maintained that the exilic Priestly Code extended and interrupted the festival cycle, adding a New Year festival on the first day and the Day of Atonement on the tenth day of the seventh month. Wellhausen explained that P's use of two calendar-year systems accounts for the disruption of the festival cycle.⁵ The first, an ecclesiastical year, is autumnal—similar to that in D and J. This yearly cycle begins with the first new moon of autumn. During the exilic period, a Babylonian influence led to the creation of a second, civil, New Year in the spring.

Wagenaar, like Wellhausen, attributes the presence of two New Year celebrations in Lev 23 to a postexilic redaction in the text. Wagenaar contends that the Gezer calendar reflects the earliest Israelite

3. The current study relies on the work of Daniel E. Fleming and Richard S. Hess. While going beyond their work and conclusions, I am deeply indebted to their prior exploration in Levitical and Emarite studies.

4. For a broader analysis of Lev 23 in light of Emar 446 see Bryan C. Babcock, "West Semitic Cultic Calendars: A Study of Leviticus 23 in Light of the Akkadian Text Emar 446" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Bristol, 2011).

5. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Scholars Press Reprints and Translations Series; Atlanta: Scholars, 1994).

ritual schedule with the year beginning in the fall.⁶ Exodus 23 and 34 preserve remnants of this early fall calendar. He argues that Exod 34:22b dates the Festival of Ingathering to “the turn of the year,” indicating a New Year beginning near the time of the autumnal equinox. Similarly, Exod 23:16b specifies the time for the Feast of Ingathering at “the end of the year,” which also occurs in the fall.⁷

During the exile, the Israelites adopted the Babylonian calendar, which begins in the spring, and maintained remnants of the earlier New Year in the fall. This resulted in the celebration of a dual New Year. Wagenaar theorizes that the Israelite exiles severed the early agricultural meaning from the Festival of Weeks, the Feast of Tabernacles, and the combined Pesach-Feast of Unleavened Bread celebrations. The purpose for these rituals also changed to political and religious renewal. In addition, the priestly author eliminated the Shabuot festival of the second month because it no longer fit the six-month festival cycle. Moreover, because of the dissimilarity of the Babylonian and early Israelite New Year festival names, Ezek 45 deleted any references to these names and adopted only a date as reference.⁸ After the exile, a priestly redactor maintained the dual New Year celebrations and restored the names to some of the rites in Lev 23.

Festival Complexes

Wagenaar points to the combining of named rites into one festival complex as a second piece of evidence confirming the late dating of Lev 23. The text depicts the observance of the Pesach meal on the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month, followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the fifteenth through the twenty-first days—creating an eight-day celebration. In the middle of the seventh month, the text records a similar eight-day observance: the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles followed by a sacred assembly on the eighth day.

Jacob Milgrom, in his 2004 commentary on Leviticus, chronicles the evolution of the festival calendar beginning with JE in Exod 23. While arguing that P and H are both preexilic (with P prior to H), Milgrom finds that the Pesach offering and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were initially (in JE) discrete rites. The Deuteronomist first

6. Wagenaar, *Origin and Transformation*, 13–21.

7. *Ibid.*, 21.

8. The semiannual format of the festivals in Ezek 45 is then preserved in the postexilic priestly calendar of Lev 23 (and Exod 12:1–13).

combined the two, and the combination continued in the postexilic sources. Milgrom concludes that shepherds observed the Pesach Offering while farmers celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread. (Both rituals served to ensure success in the coming year.) According to Milgrom, the Israelites merged the celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread with the Pesach Offering after they settled in Canaan.⁹

Wagenaar, relying on the work of Julius Wellhausen, David Clines, Ernst Kutsch, and Gustof Dalman, agrees that developments in the festival texts produced the festival complex.¹⁰ He proposes that the ancient Israelite cult (prior to a written text) held festivals three times a year to coincide with the harvests of wheat, barley, and summer fruits. The dates for the festival rites were based locally on the ripening of the crops and not on specific dates during any given month. Thus, a festival in the valley region occurred at a slightly different time than one held on the coastal plains or hillsides.

The earliest surviving written festival text, according to Wagenaar, dates to the time of Josiah. In this text, D preserves three passages, one for each festival, of approximately equal lengths—Deut 16:1aβ, 2, 5–6aba, 7 (Pesach); 16:9b–11 (Feast of Weeks); and 16:13–15 (Feast of Tabernacles).¹¹ The Deuteronomist maintained the agricultural focus of the festivals but centralized their celebrations at the Temple of YHWH.¹² D views the first festival of Pesach as a one-day ritual conducted at sunset on an unspecified day.¹³ Pesach was not a pilgrimage

9. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus* (CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 276.

10. David J. A. Clines, “The Evidence for an Autumnal New Year in Pre-Exilic Israel Reconstructed,” *JBL* 93 (1974): 22–40; Ernest Kutsch, “Erwägungen zur Geschichte der Passafeier und des Massotfestes,” *ZTK* 55 (1958): 1–35; idem, “‘am Ende des Jahres’ Zur Datierung des israelitischen Herbstfestes in Ex 23:16,” *ZAW* 83 (1971): 15–21; Gustof Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina* (7 Bände; Gütersloch: Bertelsmann, 1939).

11. Wagenaar eliminates the portions of Deut 16 that reference מצות as a later redaction. This conclusion is refuted in Babcock, “West Semitic,” 217–8, 285–6. The theory is also contested in Richard S. Hess, “Multiple-Month Ritual Calendars in the West Semitic World: Emar 446 and Leviticus 23,” in *The Future of Biblical Archaeology: Reassessing Methodologies and Assumptions* (ed. James K. Hoffmeier and Alan Millard; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 246–7.

12. Wagenaar explains that the use of חדש האביב in Exod 23:15; 34:18; and Deut 16:1 (usually translated “in the month of Abib”) does not indicate a month name, but rather an agricultural term for “season of fresh ears.” This allows Wagenaar to associate the festivals with seasons rather than fixed dates (*Origin and Transformation*, 37–44, 58–65, 156).

13. Wagenaar begins by exploring the origin of פסח. While the “pre-centralization” history of פסח is obscure, he argues based upon Dalman and Dahl that the origin of the

festival (אָהַב), finding its earliest origin as an apotropaic ritual conducted at the city-gate sanctuaries. The celebration of the Feast of Weeks was also centralized and held for one day at the conclusion of the grain harvest.¹⁴ And during this period, the Feast of Tabernacles was moved to the Temple and held for seven days after the end of the harvest season.¹⁵

The Yahwist revised the festival text of the Deuteronomist in Exod 23 and 34. These changes replaced the one-day rite of Pesach with the seven-day celebration of Unleavened Bread. J then invented the pilgrimage festival of Unleavened Bread, and added the pilgrimage festival (אָהַב) title to keep the celebration congruent with the two other pilgrimage festivals (אָהַב הָאֶסֶף, אָהַב הַקִּצִּיר). To accommodate the time constraints of the harvest, the festival spanned six days at home and a seventh day at the Temple of YHWH.

During the late period of the monarchy, a Deuteronomistic redactor (D_R) added to Deut 16 in accordance with the J text. This editor included references to the exodus narrative, an obligation to appear three times before YHWH, and a prohibition against appearing empty-handed. The editor also combined the Pesach celebration with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, thereby creating one festival. Wagenaar argues that

festival is likely not associated with the firstborn of the flock (Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina*, 160–66 and G. Dahl and A. Hjort, *Having Herds: Pastoral Herd Growth and Household Economy* [SSSA 2; Stockholm: University of Stockholm, 1976], 33–37, 90–91, 142–53). Contra Wellhausen and Van Seters because cattle, sheep, and goats do not deliver at just one time of the year (Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 84–85; John Van Seters, *A Law Book for the Diaspora: Revision in the Study of the Covenant Code* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2002], 167). Wagenaar fails to consider that, while it is true that lambs and goats are born at multiple times throughout the year, the normal time for weaning is in the spring when the grasses begin growing. This allows the lambs, born over the winter, to eat fresh grasses. In addition, as Dalman observed, the main lambing season is between December and January. This supports a firstfruits celebration in the spring when the main lambing season is complete and lambs are ready to be weaned. Finally, the fact that ovines (and bovines) give birth throughout the year does not preclude a firstfruits celebration at an agreed-upon time. For these reasons, Wagenaar’s conclusion that the Pesach sacrifice *cannot* be linked to an animal firstfruits celebration is questionable.

14. The אָהַב pilgrimage festival originally represented the festival for the cereal harvest—including both wheat and barley. The ancient celebration was conducted at regional sanctuaries, and the Deuteronomist centralized the ritual to the temple in Jerusalem, where it took place seven weeks after the beginning of the cereal harvest (Wagenaar, *Origin and Transformation*, 60).

15. פֶּסַח, another pilgrimage festival, celebrated the completion of the fall harvest (following the harvest of grapes and olives). The festival, held at the autumn equinox, lasted seven days. This was likely the date of the Israelite New Year. Wagenaar finds the origin for פֶּסַח in “accordance with the Ugaritic custom . . . to erect huts for the gods on the roof of the temple on the occasion of the New Year festival” (ibid.).

the text includes a summary statement in Deut 16:16–17 listing Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of Weeks, and Feast of Tabernacles while omitting Pesach. The omission of Pesach from the list presupposes the conflation of Pesach and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, giving priority to the Feast of Unleavened Bread.¹⁶

Wagenaar concludes his theory of transformation, finding that the festivals in Lev 23 reflect an exilic point of view (tied to fixed dates) while preserving an earlier agricultural format. During the first month, Pesach and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are celebrated on the fourteenth (Pesach) and from the fifteenth through the twenty-first days (Feast of Unleavened Bread). In this way, the festival complex becomes one eight-day festival comprised of two older named celebrations. Similarly, an eighth day is added to the Feast of Tabernacles, creating symmetry between the festivals of the spring and fall.

Variations in Festival Names and Dates

Wagenaar uses three seeming textual inconsistencies as additional evidence for an exilic dating of Lev 23: the presence of named and unnamed rituals, fixed dates for agrarian rites, and fixed and variable dates in the same text. Leviticus 23 describes the spring observance of the Pesach on the fourteenth day of the first month, the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the fifteenth through twenty-first days, and the unnamed firstfruit offerings (that included a wave offering) on the first day of the harvest followed by a new grain offering (fifty days later).¹⁷ The second grain offering is identified in Num 28 and Deut 16 as the Feast of Weeks, but remains unnamed in Lev 23.

Wagenaar argues that the combination of named/unnamed rites and offerings tied to both fixed dates and agricultural conditions in one text points to a later redaction of the text. According to Wagenaar, the early Israelite calendar had a tripartite structure that fluctuated with the ripening of the harvest. Over the course of textual development, these rites became increasingly centralized, requiring fixed dates and a severing from their agricultural origins. During the exile, and directly due to the influence of the bipartite Babylonian festival tradition, the Israelites eliminated the festivals associated with the later-ripening barley

16. Wagenaar concludes that Deut 16:1aα, b, 3–4, 8 are additions from a “post-Deuteronomomic editor who [was] dependent upon the exodus story of the Yahwist, but [did] not yet presuppose the priestly festival calendar” (ibid., 63).

17. The wave offering precedes the sacrifice of a lamb, a grain offering (flour offering mixed with oil), and a drink offering.

harvest. What remained was a festival calendar with two groupings of ritual activity observed on fixed dates in the first and seventh months.

Wagenaar hypothesizes that “upon returning to Jerusalem the priestly circles who were responsible for the festival calendar in Exod 12:1–13*; Lev 23:4–8, 23–28a, 33–37ab^a had to contend with the people who stayed behind (in Israel) . . . who had remained faithful to the traditional tripartite festival calendar in Deut 16:1–17.”¹⁸ Out of this power struggle, the post-priestly editor reintroduced the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, tied to agricultural conditions, with dating independent of the combined Pesach-Massot festival. The Feast of Tabernacles ritual was then held seven weeks from the offering of the first *omer*, thus representing a new addition to the calendar structure. Wagenaar concludes that the agrarian-based festivals and fixed-date festivals should not both coexist in an original festival calendar, the firstfruits offering (which is unconnected to the Pesach-Massot festival) must be a later addition. When determining the new date for the Feast of Tabernacles, he argues that the Pesach-Massot festival necessitated a new dating scheme because the ritual was severed from its original agricultural ties.¹⁹

Wagenaar considers the contrast between several groupings of rites set on fixed dates and a single passage tied to agricultural conditions a formal distinction within the text. He also notes that the unnamed agricultural rites do not refer to a holy convocation or prohibit work. Therefore, Wagenaar determines the bipartite structure of Lev 23 (grouping festivals in the first and seventh months on fixed dates) results from an exilic influence on the Israelite festival calendar and severs the agricultural origins in the text (because agricultural rites cannot be tied to fixed dates). The presence of unnamed agricultural rites tied to agricultural conditions reflects a postexilic addition, restoring the tripartite structure to the calendar. For Wagenaar, the key to identifying postexilic redaction is the tension between both fixed and agriculturally dependent dates and named and unnamed festivals.

Simultaneous Festivals

18. Wagenaar, *Origin and Transformation*, 134.

19. Jan Wagenaar, “The Priestly Festival Calendar and the Babylonian New Years Festivals: Origin and Transformation of the Ancient Israelite Festival Year,” in *The Old Testament in Its World* (OTS 52; ed. R. P. Gordon and J. C. de Moor; Boston: Brill, 2005), 250.

A final point for discussion is the occurrence of simultaneous festivals described in separate portions of the same text. Leviticus 23:33–36 prescribe the rites for the Feast of Tabernacles celebrated from the fifteenth to the twenty-second days of the seventh month (eight days). A summary statement (vv. 37–38) follows the passage, relating YHWH's appointed times. After the summary statement, vv. 39–43 narrate the elements of the Feast of YHWH, which also occur in the middle of the seventh month for eight days (the seven-day feast and an eighth day of rest). Because the two named festivals share many components, most scholars find that vv. 39–43 are essentially a restatement of vv. 33–36 (with some additional information).²⁰

John Hartley argues that vv. 39–43 are likely a later addition, with different origins, covering the Festival of Booths. He sees the section as distinctive because it follows the conclusion in vv. 37–38, and because v. 35 and v. 39 are so similar that they appear redundant unless one was added later.²¹ Similarly, Roy Gane concludes that vv. 39–43 give supplementary instructions for the Festival of Booths.²²

Adopting a much earlier date for Lev 23 and assigning the text to H, Milgrom agrees that the passage is a restatement which supplies additional information about the Festival of Booths. For Milgrom, the passage comprises three H components with vv. 39a and 40 based in Pre-H₁; vv. 41a and 42 assigned to H; and vv. 39b, 42, 43 redacted by H_R. While acknowledging both the differing descriptions of the Feast of Booths (vv. 33–36) and the Feast of YHWH (vv. 39–43) and the composite nature of the text's development, he concludes that vv. 39–43 intend the same festival as vv. 33–36 (i.e., the Feast of Booths).

Wagenaar follows the majority opinion that vv. 39–43 constitute an addendum to the Feast of Tabernacles. He explores the linguistic similarities to Lev 23:9–22 and notes that the two passages exhibit different forms and phraseology from other festivals. Despite the reference to the Feast of YHWH, Wagenaar argues that the rite is unnamed. He also reasons that vv. 39–43 avoids referring to the Feast of Tabernacles to remove any association with the huts, which were erected on the roof of the temple on the occasion of the New Year.²³ These distinctions lead him to conclude that the supplemental material in vv.

20. For a thorough discussion, see Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27* (AB 3B; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 2036.

21. John Hartley, *Leviticus* (WBC 4; Dallas: Word, 1992), 372–3. Timothy Willis argues a similar position (*Leviticus* [AOTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 2009]), 192.

22. Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 403.

23. Wagenaar, *Origin and Transformation*, 137.

39–43 demonstrates all the features of a postpriestly addition to the priestly festival calendar.²⁴

While scholars disagree on the composition date of vv. 39–43 and the possible transformation within the passage, most agree that the passage addresses the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths. Most authorities also find that the verses are a later redaction to the text, providing additional information for the rite. While few scholars question the festivals' different names (Feast of Tabernacles and Feast of YHWH), Wagenaar proposes that the name change resulted from a lingering negative image of the older Feast of Tabernacles.

This section presented four pieces of evidence offered by Wagenaar (and found in other recent scholarship) to support a late dating and redaction of Lev 23: the seeming depiction of two New Year celebrations, the development of a larger festival complex, the presence of named and unnamed festivals held on both fixed and fluctuating dates, and the descriptions of two festivals, celebrated simultaneously, but recorded in different parts of the same text. Wagenaar maintains that each of these distinctions is best explained by textual development or redaction. However, closely observing these same distinctions in earlier texts calls this conclusion into question.

An examination of a second-millennium Akkadian festival text from the Syrian town of Emar may inform our understanding of Lev 23.

EMAR 446–THE TEXT

Emar 446 was discovered at Late Bronze Age Emar (modern Tell Meskene).²⁵ The text is a multi-month prescriptive ritual calendar

24. *Ibid.*, 83.

25. The text was originally published by Arnaud as Msk 74280a and Msk 74291a with a transliteration and French translation in Daniel Arnaud, *Recherches au pays d'Aštata: Emar VI* (Tome 3; *Textes sumériens et accadiens planches*; Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1985), 420–25. For a modern English translation of the text, see Daniel E. Fleming, "Six Months of Ritual Supervision by the Diviner (1.124)," in *The Context of Scripture* (vol. 1; ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr.; Boston: Brill, 2003), 436–9; *idem*, *Time at Emar: Cultic Calendar and the Rituals from the Diviner's Archive* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 268–81; Babcock, "West Semitic," 193–210. For a thorough discussion of Emar, see Barry J. Beitzel, "From Harran to Imar along the Old Babylonian Itinerary: The Evidence from the Archives Royales de Mari," in *Biblical and Near Eastern Studies: Essays in Honor of William Sanford LaSor* (ed. G. A. Tuttle; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 209–19; Daniel E. Fleming, "Emar: On the Road from Harran to Hebron," in *Mesopotamia and the Bible* (ed. M. W. Chavalas and K. Lawson Younger, Jr.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 222–50; William W. Hallo, "The Road to Emar," *JCS* 18 (1964): 57–88.

unearthed in the temple identified as M₁. (This temple housed the Diviner's archive, comprising over 1,000 private documents and legal and ritual texts.) Found in a small storage room, Emar 446 details the rites over a six-month period, beginning in the fall. Both Richard Hess and Daniel Fleming note that the writing exhibits archaic features pointing to an early composition, perhaps as early as the fourteenth century.²⁶

Five of the six months are named. Although damage to the text obscures the name of the first month, a review of Emar 446 and other festival texts at Emar endorses the theory that the missing month name is *sag.mu*.²⁷ Despite the damage, several signs of structure are evident, including markings on the tablet and organizational language. The first level of organization is double lines drawn across column IV of the text. These marks divide column IV as follows: lines 77–82; 83–85; 86–95; 96–117—each covering the rites in one month.

Following the double-line dividers (and the additional division at the top of column IV) are the following phrases:

Line 77: [ⁱ]^d*An-na* 1 udu *a-na* ^d*A-dama-te-ri* (The month of Anna: One sheep is provided for ^dAdammatera.)

Line 83: ⁱⁱⁱ^d*A-dama i-na* u₄-*mi* 7 (The month of ^dAdamma: on the 7th day.)

Line 86: ⁱⁱⁱ*Mar-za-ha-ni i-na* u₄.14 (The month of Marzahāni: on the 14th day.)

Line 96: ⁱⁱⁱ^d*Hal-ma* 2 *i-na* u₄ (The month of ^dHalma: on the 2nd day.)

The information in the lines following each marker in column IV indicates that the scribe attempted to mark the divisions between the months in which festivals occurred (using temporal markers). After each division, the first word in the next line identifies the month name for the rites that follow. In three of the four sections (lines 83, 86, and 96), the referent after the month name designates the day of the first rite: days 7, 14, and 2 respectively. It is not clear why the day of the month is omitted for the month of ^dAnna (month 3), and this deviation is discussed below. Despite the absence of double-line dividers in the first three columns of the text, the evidence from column IV suggests temporal markers (specifically month names and festival dates) furnish the structure for the entire text.

26. Hess, "Multiple-Month Ritual," 235; Fleming, *Time at Emar*, 45 n. 115, 109–13.

27. Babcock, "West Semitic," 194 n. 28. Contra Fleming who argues for *Za-ra-ti*.

Emar 446 begins with an introductory heading, “tablet of the rites of the city,” that is similar to others in the Diviner’s archive. Notably Emar 369 begins “tablet of the rites for the nin.dingir of ^dim of Emar.” The introductory formula in Emar 446 makes clear that the multi-month festival calendar is not attributed to one god or goddess or to one temple, but is a tablet for “the rites of the city.” This introductory phrase explains that the rituals broadly apply to all the residents of Emar and likely to the wider region controlled by Emar.

The text has six primary sections, each composed of the rites in one month. All the sections begin with the mention of the month name, and most also open with an introductory formula that reads, “*X* month, on the *Y* day, at *Z* time of day, *A* performs some primary activity on the first day of the festival.” The primary activity may be an offering (lines 3, 58, and 77), a procession (line 84), or a specific activity central to the festival (the *Bugarātu* in line 86 or the honorific ceremony in line 97). Temporal markers further divide the sections by noting a change in the date of the activities. And a final subdivision by the temporal markers highlights the continuing action “on that day” (*U₄ šuwatuma*), “in the morning” (*šērtamma*), “in the evening” (*nubätte*), “in that month” (*iti šuwatuma*). Of these subdividers, *U₄ šuwatuma* occurs most often (five times), mainly in the first month (three times).

EMAR 446—CHARACTERISTICS OF SACRED TIME

Although in this study we analyze the potential similarities between Lev 23 and Emar 446, we remain mindful that Emar 446 and Lev 23 are texts from distinct cultures with unique ritual expressions.²⁸ Therefore, while they share many similarities, differences are not only understandable but expected. First, the two cultures understood deities in different ways; one was traditionally monotheistic and the other polytheistic. (This may appear oversimplified as Israel, at times, practiced polytheism. However,

28. For background information on Emar see Fleming, “Emar: On the Road from Harran to Hebron”; idem, *Time at Emar*; Uwe Finkbeiner, “Emar 1999: Bericht über die 3 Kampagne der syrisch-deutschen Ausgrabungen Mit Beiträgen von Hala Attoura, Betina Faist, Uta König, Ferhan Sakal und Frank Starke,” *BaghM* 32 (2001): 41–120; idem, “Emar 2001: Bericht über die 4 Kampagne der syrisch-deutschen Ausgrabungen: Mit Beiträgen von Hala Attoura und Wendy Eixler und unter Mitarbeit von Ferhan Sakal,” *BaghM* 33 (2002): 109–46; idem, “Emar 2002: Bericht über die 5 Kampagne der syrisch-deutschen Ausgrabungen,” *BaghM* 34 (2003): 9–117; Wayne T. Pitard, “The Archaeology of Emar,” in *Emar: The History, Religion, and Culture of a Syrian Town in Late Bronze Age* (ed. M. W. Chavalas; Bethesda, MD: CDL, 1996), 18–19; Jean-Claude Margueron, “Quatre campagnes de fouilles à Emar (1972–1974),” *Syria* 52 (1975): 84–85; Jean-Claude Margueron, “Rapport préliminaire sur les deux premières campagnes de fouille à Meskéné-Emar (1972–1973),” *AAAS* 25 (1975): 76–77.

the normative theological message from the prophets was monotheistic, despite the polytheistic worship by many Israelites.) Second, Emar used the image of the god in ritual, while YHWH had no image. Third, a central rite in Emar 446 was the procession, a noticeable distinction from Lev 23, which does not mention a procession. And finally, fourth, the two preserve grammatical differences. Emar 446 is written entirely in the third person, while Lev 23 includes both second- and third-person verbs.

With these differences in mind, we will return to the four specific points identified by Wagenaar (and other recent scholars) as internal discrepancies within Lev 23, differences these scholars have relied on as evidence of later redaction. And we will try to determine if these inconsistencies also appear in the second-millennium ritual calendar at Emar. Their presence would place Wagenaar's late dating of Lev 23 in doubt and invalidate their use as indicators of late authorship or redaction.

Dual New Year Celebrations

Ritual texts of the third- and second-millennia share many attributes. One striking similarity is the prominence of festivals in both the first and seventh months of the year. The festivals of these months often describe activities as a "New Year celebration" for the area, with the primary festivals occurring at the full moon (the fourteenth or fifteenth day of the month). This supports the proposal that at least some city-states in Mesopotamia viewed the larger year in terms of two six-month units that could be associated with the vernal and autumnal equinoxes.²⁹ Beyond being associated with the New Year, these festivals are most often associated with agricultural rites. The festivals of the first month celebrate the harvest and firstfruits (e.g., zag-mu at Nippur and še-kin-ku-rá at Ur and Lagaš).³⁰ The festivals of the seventh month represent either the end of the fall harvest (grapes—*reš yani* festival at Ugarit—and some late fruits) or the start of preparing the ground for spring planting (e.g., á-ki-ti-šu-numun at Ur). Despite the festivals' being

29. For a detailed discussion of second- and third-millennium festival calendars, see Mark E. Cohen, *The Cultic Calendars of the Ancient Near East* (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 1993); Julye Bidmead, *The Akitu Festival: Religious Continuity and Royal Legitimation in Mesopotamia* (Gorgias Dissertations Near Eastern Studies 2; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2002); David T. Stewart, "A Brief Comparison of the Israelite and Hittite Festival Calendars," in *Lev 23–27* (ed. Jacob Milgrom; AB 3B; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 2076–80; T. M. Sharlach, "Diplomacy and the Rituals of Politics at the Ur III Court," *JCS* 57 (2005): 22.

30. For a thorough modern summary of the Akitu festival, see Bidmead, *The Akitu Festival*.

agriculturally based, the texts often record rituals occurring on fixed dates (usually centered on the new moon and full moon) and at fixed locations (usually at the temple for the lead regional deity).

This dual six-month ritual calendar, with New Year celebrations in the spring and fall, is supported by the third- and second-millennium Akitu festival at Ur. The festival, held in the first month, was á-ki-ti-š-kin-ku₅, “the Akitu of the harvest.” The Akitu of the seventh month was known by a different name, á-ki-ti-š-u-numun, meaning “the Akitu of seeding.” The festival held in the seventh month was the more important ritual of the two as the seventh month bore the name of the festival. Each Akitu festival may have marked the beginning of the six-month-long “equinox year” and taken place at a phase change in the lunar cycle.³¹

The ritual calendar at Emar represents a similar orientation to the ritual calendars found at Ur, Nippur, Lagaš, and Ugarit. Emar 446 includes the rites for the city over a six-month period, thus supporting the conclusion that several ancient Near Eastern cultures viewed the annual calendar as two six-month units. In addition, the calendar begins either at or near the time of an equinox (autumnal equinox) with a dominant agricultural festival held on a fixed date at the full moon. Though Emar 446 does not contain the term “New Year” or “Head of the Year” (which may be lost due to the significant damage to the first column of the text), it gives prominent position to the rites conducted in the first month (fall). The text contains rites similar to those conducted in the first month of the fall six-month cycle, for example, the planting rituals and rites for Dagan, the dominant deity of the area, during the full moon. The six-month Emar ritual calendar ends with the Day of Renewal of Dagan in the spring—an allusion to the late winter or early spring rituals in some other Mesopotamian cultic calendars (the renewal of the spring harvest season and the care for the dead).

The yearly calendars described in Emar 446 and Lev 23 share similarities with other third- and second-millennium ancient Near Eastern ritual texts. Both Lev 23 and Emar 446 include the ritual activities observed over roughly a half-year period. This supports the finding that West Semitic cultures viewed the annual calendar as two-six month units.³² Both texts also begin at or near the time of an equinox (autumnal equinox for Emar and vernal equinox for Lev 23) with dominant agricultural festivals. In addition, both calendars include significant groupings of festivals in the spring and fall aligned with the full moon (middle of the month).

31. Cohen, *Cultic Calendars*, 400.

32. Hess notes that both calendars cover roughly a half-year period, with one beginning in the spring (Israel) and the other in the fall (Emar) (“Multiple-Month Ritual,” 242).

Based upon this evidence, Lev 23 likely preserves the second-millennium practice of a dual six-month ritual calendar. Therefore, Wagenaar's grouping of rituals in the middle of the first and seventh months should not be used as grounds for a late dating of the text.

Festival Complexes

Evidence from Emar 446 demonstrates that named rites take place on adjacent days and are combined into a larger festival complex. The most frequent—perhaps the central—rite in the Emar multi-month calendar (occurring at least twelve times) is the procession complex for the god or goddess of the festival.³³

The verb *wasû* identifies the procession complex, which combines three primary rites.³⁴ The first rite is the slaughtering and offering of one lamb (*sila₄*) to a god or goddess (cf. lines 7, 18, 23). On the next day (day 2 of the complex) the god or goddess processes out of the temple and often to, or through, a notable gate of the city. The third rite of the processional complex is a return ceremony, including offerings and a festival meal with meat, bread, and drink offerings consumed by a broader population (cf. lines 21, 29, 37, 61, 119). One illustration of the procession complex is identified in lines 58–61:

The month of ^dnin.kur.ra: on the 17th day they offer a lamb for ^dnin.kur. On the 18th day ^dnin.kur.ra goes out in procession one good quality white sheep (is) provided by the *nuppuhannû* men. The men of the consecration-gift [. . .] eat and drink bread and beer.

A second example of a festival complex outlines the planting rites in the middle of the first month (fall). This festival complex has three parts (two named ceremonies and one unnamed ceremony). On the fifteenth day of the month, the image of ^dŠaggar proceeds to the cattle barn and the horse stable; one sheep is slaughtered at each location in an unnamed rite (lines 45–46). Later that evening, a named ceremony offers three sheep for two gods and the people (lines 47–53), and the Diviner throws seed on the ground in an agricultural rite. On the next day,

33. A full analysis of ritual activity in each month can be found in Babcock, "West Semitic," 235–47.

34. Three verbs describe the movement of a god or goddess out of the temple. Only one of the verbs (*wacû*) seems to be associated with the procession complex, and the other two verbs (*tûrtu* and *cadu*) may represent another form of rite.

another named ceremony occurs that includes a lasting oath (lines 53–56). The three distinct rites are grouped into one larger festival complex that ends with a prohibition against planting until the completion of the honorific ceremony (*kubadu*) (line 57). While this complex is primarily intended as a planting festival, sheep are prominently sacrificed. This demonstrates that, like the observances of Pesach and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, agricultural festivals may incorporate offerings of both meat and grain. Moreover, the agricultural festival complex happens on fixed dates despite the possible fluctuations in the ripening of crops. Lines 45–57 of the text read:

On the 15th day, they bring ^dŠaggar down to the cattle barn and (perform) the slaughter. They slaughter one sheep at the horse stable. During that month, during the evening ceremony, they bring out (a procession). They slaughter one sheep for the *nuppuhanū* men, one sheep for the garden of ^dBaal's sacred pool, and a sheep for ^dDagan Lord of the Seed. The Diviner throws seed onto the ground. The [. . .] bread (item) from the House of the Gods(?), cups (*of drink*), and the meat of the right breast belong to the Diviner. On the next day, in the morning ...they slaughter (a sacrifice) for ^dDagan and perform an honorific ceremony by lasting oath(?) and by [. . .] until they finish the honorific ceremony, no one may go out to plant.

A third example occurs in Emar 446 lines 86–94, where the text prescribes the festival activities in the month of Marzahāni. Rites include the following: the *Buqarātu* ceremony, a procession, a burnt offering, and the carrying of loaves. Like the festivals discussed above, this festival complex melds the pastoral aspect of a burnt offering with the agricultural offering of grain or bread into a larger festival observance.

Lines 96–119 identify a final ritual complex, during the month of ^dHalma, which includes an honorific ceremony (*kubadu*), a drink offering, a burnt offering, the Day of Renewal of ^dDagan, and a procession. These lines read:

The month of ^dHalma: on the 2nd day they perform the honorific ceremony at the Temple of ^dDagan. In the evening they fill a goblet with wine and burn a bird. The Day of Renewal of ^dDagan falls on the 3rd. One sheep is provided by the city the divine axe remains in the temple. The sheep's hide belongs to the Diviner. On the 8th day ^dHalma goes out in procession. The divine axe follows him. One sheep is provided by the city. The men of the consecration-gift (?) feast. The bread and beer belong to the

leader. On that day, they offer a lamb at the temple of ^dBaal. On the 9th day ^dBaal of Canaan goes out in procession. An ox and six sheep proceed to his temple. Among them [. . . from(?)]the Temple of ^dDagan (?) the Lord <(of...?)> he receives. . . [. . . the men] who give(?)the consecration-gift(?) [. . .] the hides, the intestines, the fat [. . .] belong to the Diviner. [. . .] the hip [. . .] belongs to the king of the land.

The merging of named and unnamed rites into larger festival complexes is a point of similarity between Lev 23 and Emar 446. In Lev 23:5–8 the Pesach ceremony and Festival of Unleavened Bread are apparently combined into one festival complex. This complex consists of two named rites and illustrates a possible conflict between the meat offerings of a pastoral society and the grain offerings of an agricultural society. The verses read:

In the first month, on the fourteenth [day] of the month, at twilight, a Passover offering to YHWH, and on the fifteenth day of that month the Feast of Unleavened Bread to YHWH. Seven days you are to eat unleavened bread. On the first day shall be for you a sacred occasion: do no heavy labor. Thus for seven days you shall offer food offerings to YHWH. On the seventh day is a sacred assembly: you shall do no heavy labor.

Wagenaar argues that the joining of these named rites furnishes proof of a late redaction of the text. However, the evidence from Emar 446 demonstrates that the use of festival complexes was already attested in second-millennium West Semitic rituals.³⁵

Variations in Festival Names and Dates

The Emarite ritual text describes three related aspects relevant to this section: (1) some festivals are named while others are unnamed in the same text; (2) agricultural festivals occur on fixed dates; and (3) some festivals occur on fixed dates while other dates are left ambiguous in the same text.

35. Hess argues that the combination of pastoral and agrarian festival elements of burnt lambs, various breads, lack of an altar, and minimized role of the priest/diviner in a festival “celebrated by a settled West Semitic people in the Late Bronze Age raises additional questions about the degree of certainty that can be ascribed to the posited evolutionary development of the biblical festival” (“Multiple-Month Ritual,” 249–50).

Although Lev 23 names many festivals, ceremonies, and rituals, the agricultural festivals in the first and third months remain unnamed. The first month identifies an anonymous agricultural firstfruit celebration for the barley harvest on “the day after the Sabbath-week” (v. 11). Exodus 23:16 names the first festival as the “Festival of the Harvest.” The text identifies a second unnamed firstfruits festival seven weeks later for the wheat harvest. Exodus 34:22 and Num 28:26–31 record this second festival as the “Festival of Weeks.” The reverse is also true: Lev 23:26–32 names the Day of Atonement while Num 29:7–11 leaves the rite unnamed.

Wagenaar bolsters his case for a late redaction to the text, insisting that (1) the presence of both named and unnamed festivals in the same text is inconsistent and best explained by a later addition; (2) the celebration of agricultural festivals on fixed dates is an exilic development that followed the festivals’ separation from their agricultural origins; and (3) the presence of some festivals tied to fixed dates and others to flexible dates points to a textual redaction combining two distinct traditions.

The second-millennium B.C. ritual text from Emar demonstrates a similar consolidation of named and unnamed festivals. Emar 446 records an unnamed festival beginning on the fifteenth of the first month. Emar 375 appears to describe the same festival—with the name *Zukru*. Therefore, the practice of naming a festival in one text and leaving it unnamed in another preserves an early West Semitic practice and may not indicate later redaction or authorial traditions.

Emar 446 also demonstrates that a second-millennium culture celebrated agricultural rites on fixed dates. During the month of *sag.mu* (first month), on the fifteenth day (full moon) of the month, a planting ceremony occurs (see translation of Emar 446 lines 45–57 above). This agricultural festival begins with offerings to ^dŠaggar at the cattle barn (é *gud^{meš}*) and horse stable (é *anše.kur.ra*). Although the use of horses in agriculture is debated, these offerings may have been intended to prepare the draft animals for plowing and planting. The rite continues with a procession including offerings to the *nuppuhanū* men, the Garden of Ba‘al’s Sacred Pool, and Dagan Lord of the Seed. The ceremony concludes with the Diviner throwing seed onto the ground in a rite of planting. On the following day (sixteenth of the month) there is an honorific ceremony that includes the taking of oaths. After the completion of the oaths, everyone may go out to plant. According to the

text, these agrarian-based rites took place on set dates, despite the annual fluctuations in the planting dates produced by the lunar calendar.³⁶

The rituals found in Emar 446 contest Wagenaar's assumption that the hosting of agricultural rituals on fixed dates requires a textual redaction. Therefore, the observance of agricultural rites on fixed dates does not, by itself, necessitate a later redaction to the text or late textual development.³⁷

Although most rites in the multi-month Emarite ritual calendar occur on fixed dates and follow a structured formula, the festival during the third month (^dAnna) does not specify a date for ritual activity. Lines 77–82 read:

The month of ^dAnna: One sheep is provided for ^dAdammatera. The *nuppuhannū* men, along with the *hamšau* men, give a sheep, [bread] and beer one sheep for the *abū* shrine of the gods, one sheep for the Temple of ^dDagan, and a sheep for the town—these sheep are provided by the *nuppuhannū* men the Diviner receives these hides.

The lack of a number for the day, which is unique in the text, led Fleming to conclude that the activities may have taken place on different days each year.³⁸ Hess argues that the lack of a mentioned date may indicate that activities occurred on the first day of the month—at the new moon.³⁹ In either case, the text includes rites on both specified and unspecified dates. A second example of an unspecified date occurs in Emar 446 line 47. This line reads “during that month, during the evening ceremony.” Hess, citing this line, argues that there is an early precedent for cultic calendars including agricultural rites on both fixed dates and

36. Fleming argues that while the text holds a prescriptive nature, the set dates may refer to only one year. Fleming states that “although the scribe has chosen verbal forms that imply that regular repetition of the ritual is to be expected, it is possible that the specific date applies only to one observance” (*Time*, 141). This study argues against Fleming and for a fixed date: A fixed date follows the custom, found in other ancient Near Eastern cultures, of hosting rituals at the full-moon phase of the first and seventh months. For Fleming to be correct, the rituals would not so closely align with the lunar phases and would occur on random dates.

37. Hess makes the same conclusion (“Multiple-Month Ritual,” 248).

38. Fleming (*Time*, 162) bases his argument on Jack M. Sasson, who concludes that festival dates at Mari were occasionally flexible (“The Calendar and Festivals of Mari during the Reign of Zimri Lim,” in *Studies in Honor of Tom B. Jones* [ed. Makvin A. Powell, Jr. and Ronald H. Sack; AOAT 203; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Verlag, 1979], 119–41).

39. Hess, “Multiple-Month Ritual,” 244.

dates tied to the agricultural harvest or planting.⁴⁰ He concludes that these variations on the general theme at Emar demonstrate that differences in the date formula should not be used to designate editorial layers.⁴¹

Simultaneous Festivals

Emar 446 provides two examples of simultaneous rituals. Lines 11–21 and 22–40 both give accounts of a procession complex for ^dnin.urta on the fifteenth day of the first month. The rituals in this complex consist of the offering of a lamb, a procession, a festival meal of bread and beer, the use of the divine axe, and the sacrifice of a sheep. Line 22 divides the two passages with the temporal marker “on that day.” While the two Emar rituals on the fifteenth day are similar, they are not identical. The first processes through the Amit gate, and involves the entire population, who reenter the temple through the “primary gate.” The second processes out through the “main gate” with an ox and six sheep. The second rite does not include the general population; instead, it specifies a feast for the leader of the people. Examples from the two portions of the text demonstrate these similarities and differences:

Lines 11–13, 16, 21 read: On that [sa]me day (the 15th day of the first month), [^dnin.urta] processes out through the] **Amit** [Gate]. They give [. . . (an offering) provided by] the **House of the Gods** . . . the **entire population** . . . consume the bread and beer from out of the **House [of the Gods]**.

Lines 22–24, 29–30 read: On [that] day (the 15th day of the first month), they offer [a lamb at] the **Temple of ^dnin.urta**. [^dNin.urta] goes out in procession [to] the **main gate**. . . . the **leader and the people of the countryside** eat [and drink] in the **Temple of [(^dnin.urta)]**.

Lines 8–10 and 45–57 supply a second example of simultaneous festivals. Held for ^dDagan and ^dSaggar on the fifteenth day of the same month, these festivals include similar rites.⁴² Lines 8–10 read: “On the

40. Hess, *Leviticus* (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary; rev. ed.; ed. Tremper Longman, III and David E. Garland; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 785.

41. Hess, “Multiple-Month Ritual,” 244.

42. A text from Ugarit provides evidence of rites described in different parts of the same text, seemingly out of chronological order. KTU 1.41 relates activities on the thirteenth

15th day, ^dDagan goes [out in procession . . .] a sheep which the *nappuhannū* men give [. . .] the [. . .] men [eat].” Although the text is severely damaged, it is evident that the rite occurs on the fifteenth day of the month and involves a sheep offering. The context of the passage implies that the sheep plays a role in both a procession and festival meal. Several lines later, while still describing activities in the same month, the text mentions a ritual to ^dSaggar. Lines 45–46 read: “On the 15th day, they bring ^dSaggar down to the cattle barn and (perform) the slaughter. They slaughter one sheep at the horse stable . . .” Both rites refer to the movement of the god and the offering of a sheep, but, like the first example, the festivals are not identical. Clearly these lines show that two similar rituals may be held simultaneously, even though the account of each appears in a different part of the text.

The appearance of similar rituals on the same day recalls the reading in Lev 23 regarding the Feast of Tabernacles and Feast of YHWH. The two passages read:

YHWH spoke to Moses, saying: “Say to the Israelites thus: ‘On the fifteenth day of this seventh month *there shall be* the Feast of Tabernacles, *for* seven days to YHWH.⁴³ The first day shall be a sacred occasion; do no heavy labor. Seven days you shall present food offerings to YHWH. On the eighth day, you shall observe a sacred occasion and present a food offering to YHWH. It is a solemn assembly; do no heavy labor.

‘However, on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered the crops of the land, you shall celebrate the Feast of YHWH seven days: on the first day, rest and on the eighth day, rest. On the first day you shall take for yourselves fruit of splendid trees: fronds of palms, branches of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before YHWH your God seven days. You shall celebrate it as a Feast of YHWH for seven days in the year as a lasting ordinance, throughout your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. In

and fourteenth days of the month prior to a discussion of activities on the sixth day of the month. Also discussed by Hess, “Multiple-Month Ritual,” 245.

43. The meaning of Tabernacles and the role of “booths” are not clarified in the text. Hess indicates the practice of living in huts was likely ended by the writing of Lev 23. According to Hess, the meaning may be associated with the prior practice of living in huts in Egypt (the location of Succoth—meaning “tabernacles”) in Exod 12:37–13:20, or with the practice of living in huts near the sanctuary in Jerusalem during festivals (*Leviticus*, 790–91). Also discussed in Daniel Fleming, “The Israelite Festival Calendar and Emar’s Ritual Archive,” *RB* 106 (1999): 8–34.

booths you shall live seven days; all citizens in Israel shall live in booths, in order that your generations may know that I made the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt; I am YHWH your God.”

In both festivals participants live in booths, rest, and honor YHWH. Just as in Emar 446, the two festivals in Lev 23 differ: the Festival of YHWH adds rejoicing with four species of leafy trees, a rationale for living in booths, and a specific call for native Israelites to live in booths. However, the Festival of Tabernacles has a different name and includes the sacred assembly.

Based upon the evidence from Emar, the overlap of two rituals on the same day is not sufficient evidence (by itself) to conclude the Festival of Tabernacles and the Festival of YHWH are intended to be the same festival.⁴⁴ In addition, the evidence from Emar calls Wagenaar’s conclusions into question. This study argues, following Hess, that simultaneous festivals occurring in passages from different parts of the text should not be used, in isolation, as evidence of late authorship or redaction.⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

This analysis examined four pieces of evidence used by Jan Wagenaar to argue that the festival calendar of Lev 23 reflects an exilic transformation, directly influenced by the first-millennium Babylonian priesthood. The study compared Lev 23 with Emar 446 and evaluated the texts’ similarities with regard to the following features: the depiction of a dual six-month calendar with New Year celebrations in the first and seventh months; the practice of combining named rites into larger festival complexes; the presence of named and unnamed rituals, agricultural rites on fixed dates, and both fixed and unspecified dates for rites in the same text; and the recording of simultaneous festivals in different parts of the same text.

Our findings challenge Wagenaar’s conclusions. Because the four elements occur in an earlier West Semitic text, their presence in Lev 23 cannot be used to offer proof of a later textual transformation or redaction. On the contrary, the evidence strengthens the theory that Lev 23 may preserve an early West Semitic ritual tradition dating to the second millennium.

44. Following Hess, *Leviticus*, 792.

45. Hess, “Multiple-Month Ritual,” 245–6.

It is always important to remember that Israel did not exist in a vacuum. Hallo defines the purpose of comparative analysis, stating that “it is not to find the key to every biblical phenomenon in some ancient Near Eastern precedent, but rather to silhouette the biblical text against its wider literary and cultural environment and thus to arrive at a proper assessment of the extent to which the biblical evidence reflects that environment or, on the contrary, is distinctive and innovative over against it.”⁴⁶ This study follows in Hallo’s footsteps by providing another step towards understanding the context of Lev 23.

46. William W. Hallo, “Compare and Contrast: the Contextual Approach to Biblical Literature,” in *The Bible in the Light of Cuneiform Literature: Scripture in Context III* (ed. William W. Hallo, Bruce William Jones, and Gerald L. Mattingly; Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies 8; Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1990), 3.