

Tonight: April 11, 2018

FirstFruits

What We Have Learned Thus Far

- Fulfillment of the Passover / Feast of Unleavened Bread
 - the Passover that began as Israel's deliverance now fulfills what God always had in mind as the ultimate blessing for the world as set out in Genesis 12 verses 1 to 3
 - There is now a second and even greater Exodus deliverance for all who believe in Jesus (Jew and Gentile; all the families of the earth; all nations)
 - the Last Supper (a Passover meal) becomes a commentary on what God was doing in and through the work of His Son, Jesus
 - Paul uses the Lord's Supper (the recast Passover meal) as an opportunity to teach how we are to live as Christians

Quick Summary of Three Feasts

- **Passover** – pictures the substitutionary death of the Messiah as the Passover Lamb
- **The Feast of Unleavened Bread** – pictures the burial of the Messiah (holiness/no decay)
- **Firstfruits** – pictures the resurrection of the Messiah

The Study of ... First Things

- Within the church, there is much effort made in the area of Eschatology (the study of *last things*) as people delve into the biblical doctrines of future prophetic events.
- Not a major discipline, nor often examined, the subject of *first things* is one about which the Bible has much to say.
- Somewhat obscure, and largely unobserved in a formal sense for almost 2000 years, Israel's Feast of Firstfruits was an ancient holy day solely devoted to *first things*.
- The Feast of Firstfruits has a powerful message and timeless truths for God's people today.

Leviticus 23:9-14

The Feast of Firstfruits

⁹ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁰ “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, ¹¹ **and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.**¹² And on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering to the LORD. ¹³ And the grain offering with it shall be two tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, a food offering to the LORD with a pleasing aroma, and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, a fourth of a hin. ¹⁴ And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

The Meaning of Firstfruits

- Firstfruits marked the beginning of the cereal grain harvests in Israel. Barley was the first grain to ripen of those sown in the winter months.
- For Firstfruits, a sheaf of barley was harvested and brought to the temple as a thanksgiving offering (waved) **to the Lord for the harvest.**
- It was representative of the barley harvest as a whole and served as a pledge or guarantee that the remainder of the harvest would be realized in the days that followed.

Prophetic Fulfillment

John 12:23-36

²³ And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. ²⁷ “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹ The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.”³⁰ Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. ³⁴ So the crowd answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” ³⁵ So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

Big Picture

- Passover pictures Christ as the Lamb who was '**slain**' in the crucifixion;
 - We have the promise that Christ was slain on our behalf (He has died in my place)
- Unleavened Bread pictures Christ as the holy one that did not see decay / corruption;
 - We have the promise that God will make us clean through the process of sanctification (called to holy living)
- Firstfruits pictures Christ who was '**raised**' up as firstfruits in the resurrection,
 - We have the promise that in Christ, those who are asleep will be made alive (join Him in resurrection)

The Time of Firstfruits

- Firstfruits was an early spring feast, the third in the Jewish festive cycle. On the Hebrew calendar, it is generally believed to occur on the 16th day of Nisan, the first biblical month (March or April), two days after the beginning of the Passover season.
- Scripture did not specify the actual calendar day of Firstfruits, but merely prescribed its time of observance to be "on the day after the Sabbath" (Lev. 23:11).

Three Feasts of the Lord: Passover, Feast of Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits

Passover	Feast of Unleavened Bread						
14th	15th	16th	17th	18th	19th	20th	21st
Paschal Lamb Slain	1st Day Feast of Unleavened Bread	The Omer (First Fruits)	-	-	-	-	7th Day Feast of Unleavened Bread
Not a sabbath	A sabbath No servile work	Not a sabbath	-	-	-	-	A sabbath No servile work
Unleaven Bread Eaten							
All Leaven Removed From the House							
Crucifixion	In the tomb	Resurrection	-	-	-	-	-
1st Day	2nd Day	3rd Day					

Alternative to 16th Day of Nisan

- I mentioned several weeks back that there are various methods of determining the days of the feasts as well as many different views on the actual day of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection
- One alternate view (though it has many reiterations) is that Jesus was crucified on the Passover (14th day), but that the weekly Sabbath day followed the special Sabbath the day after Passover, such that back-to-back Sabbaths occurred (i.e. Passover on 14th, First Day of Unleavened Bread on 15th (special Sabbath), regular Sabbath (Saturday – the 7th day in the Hebrew weekly calendar) on the 16th, and then Firstfruits / resurrection on Sunday the 17th)
- Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, wrote: *“But on the second day of unleavened bread, which is the sixteenth day of the month, they first partake of the fruits of the earth, for before that day they do not touch them”* (Antiquities of the Jews 3.10.5).

Ritual for Firstfruits

Deuteronomy 26:1-10

When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance and have taken possession of it and live in it, ² you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from your land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket, and you shall go to the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name to dwell there. ³ And you shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, 'I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our fathers to give us.' ⁴ Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God. ⁵ "And you shall make response before the LORD your God, 'A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. ⁶ And the Egyptians treated us harshly and humiliated us and laid on us hard labor. ⁷ Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. ⁸ And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders. ⁹ And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰ **And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O LORD, have given me.'** And you shall set it down before the LORD your God and worship before the LORD your God.

Other Use of Firstfruits

Lev 23:15-16

¹⁵ “You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. ¹⁶ You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD.

- Time marker to the Feast of Weeks (4th Feast)
- Also known as “counting the omer” (counting the days from the sheaf / *omer* in Hebrew)

Application: First Things in General

First things are an important and often repeated theme of Scripture

- God declared that, in general, the firstfruits of all agricultural produce belonged to Him, from grain, to wine, to oil, to fleece (Exo. 22:29; 23:19, 34:26; Deut. 18:4 and 26:2), which included all of the seven major crops of the land of Israel: barley, wheat, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates.
- The firstfruits of the bread dough also belonged to Him as a “heave offering” (Num. 15:20-21).
- The firstborn males of all animals (Exo. 22:30; Lev. 27:26) and the firstborn of the Israelites themselves belonged to Him (Exo. 13:2, 12-15; 34:19-20; Num. 3:13; 18:15-16)

Firstborn

- The firstborn male was to be presented to the priest at one month of age (Num. 18:16). The firstborn could be redeemed and thus freed from lifetime service to God. See Luke 2:23, example of Jesus, “As it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord’”.
- When God redeemed Israel out of Egyptian bondage, He did so through the blood of the Passover lamb. All firstborn were under the curse of death and judgment. Escape was possible only by exhibiting faith in God through the blood of the innocent Passover lamb (Exo. 12:12-13).
- Of course, in the spiritual sense, all people are firstborn. All are sinners just as Adam and, therefore, are under the curse of death and in need of redemption. Escape is possible only by exhibiting faith in God through the redemptive blood of the Messiah, the true Passover Lamb, sacrificed as our substitute (1 Cor. 5:7)

Application:

First Things in the New Testament

Although not as strongly emphasized in the Hebrew Scriptures as the other Levitical feasts, the Feast of Firstfruits is mentioned at least seven (7) occasions in the New Testament

- Romans 16:5 ~ Paul spoke of Epaenetus as “the firstfruits of Achaia” (the first of many to trust in Jesus in western Asia Minor)
- 1 Cor. 16:15 ~ Paul spoke of the household of Stephanas as the “firstfruits of Achaia”, some of the first believers in that large harvest in Asia Minor

Firstfruits in the New Testament (con'd)

- Romans 11:16 ~ “For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy”. Paul was intending that if God chose and accepted the patriarchs, then the whole lump of dough (Israel) belonged to Him
- James 1:18 ~ James, speaking of believers as set apart to the Lord, taught, “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures”.
- Romans 8:23 ~ Paul spoke of “first fruits of the Spirit” in reference to salvation. The indwelling of the Spirit of God is the guarantee, or pledge, that there will be a final redemption

The Fulfillment of Firstfruits: The Resurrection of Jesus 1 Corinthians 15:20-23

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

- Further, Revelation 1:5 reads, “and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood”.
- The resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee and the beginning (firstfruits) of the final harvest, or resurrection, of all mankind
- Jesus, our Messiah, fulfilled the prophetic meaning of this holy day by rising from the dead to become the firstfruits of the resurrection, and He did it on the very day of Firstfruits

Resurrection Themes in Scripture

Isaiah 25:8

He will swallow up death forever;
and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces,
and the reproach of his people he will take away
from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.

Daniel 12:2

² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Resurrection Themes in Scripture

John 5:28-29 ²⁸ Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

1 Thes. 4:16

¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

Resurrection / Judgment in Matthew

Matt. 3:12 and 13:37-43

¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

³⁷ He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one,³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels.⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers,⁴² and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Importance of the Resurrection

1 Cor. 15:3-4, 17-19, 20, 21

³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,” ... ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

Summary of the Three Spring Feasts

- God creates a new calendar for his people, a nation set apart for his glory and for drawing all people to God
- Spring Feasts:
 - Passover (sacrifice of our Passover Lamb) - *crucifixion*
 - Unleavened Bread (Jesus is sinless, no corruption) and in that same way we are called to be holy
 - Firstfruits (Jesus is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep) - *resurrection*

Remaining Feasts

- Mentioned earlier, Firstfruits is a time marker by which we can determine when Shavuot (Pentacost – fiftieth day) will occur
 - 50 days after the (early) Firstfruits are the latter Firstfruits
 - Acts 2:1 – giving of Holy Spirit (why were people gathered?)
 - May 19, 2018 (at sundown) ~ Hebrew counting of time
 - Pentacost today: 7th Sunday after Easter Sunday (May 20)

Fall Feasts

- Feast of Trumpets (September 10, 2018)
- Day of Atonement (September 19, 2018)
- Feast of Tabernacles (September 24, 2018)

Extra-Biblical Feasts (outside of Lev. 23)

- Purim (Esther – March 1, 2018); and,
- Hanukkah (Feast of Lights, mentioned in John 10:22ff, Dec. 3 '18)