

## 13. The feasts of the Lord

April 23, 2009

In my opinion this chapter 23 of the Book of Leviticus is one of the reasons why so many Christians stay away from studying this book. It is rather confusing to absorb all these feasts of the Lord that were instructed for the ancient Jewish people to follow.

Our thought would be, "OK, how does that connect with us and our daily life?" Materialistically, nothing much. But spiritually, I see a tremendous amount of information that explain to us how these seven Jewish ancient feasts are related to the prophetic nature of Jesus Christ of which were fulfilled and will be fulfilled. While I study this chapter, I couldn't help myself from saying, "Wow, what an incredible and great God we serve!"

In this chapter, these special days are called "feasts" nine times and "holy convocations" ten times. "Feasts" have a small portion to do with eating. In fact, on the Day of Atonement, the people fasted. The word 'feast' simply means "appointed times." 'Convocation' means "proclamation" or "announcement."

### A. SABBATH

*Leviticus 23:1-3 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts. 3 'Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings.*

Since you guys have been reading ahead as I asked you to do so, I am sure that you all have noticed that there are actually eight special days mentioned in this chapter including Sabbath. The weekly Sabbath wasn't one of the annual feasts, but it was an important day for the Jewish people, and they were expected to honor it. To dishonor it meant death.

Then you have to wonder, "Why did God put Sabbath in here before all the feasts are mentioned?" It is included here because it was used as a rule of thumb to measure all the feasts' timeline.

God gave the Sabbath to Israel for several reasons according to Genesis 2:1-3. For one thing, it provided needed rest and refreshment for the people, the farm animals, and the land. Sabbath comes from a Hebrew word that means "to rest, to cease from labor".

We are no longer to observe days and seasons because Christ has fulfilled them. Besides, the Jewish Sabbath is Saturday and some Christians think that Sabbath is Sunday. That would be a wrong interpretation.

The Sabbath was also a special sign between God and His covenant people. Our true rest only comes through redemption in our God Jesus only. Rest and redemption are the twofold aspect of the Sabbath day.

*Matthew 11:28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

## **B. PASSOVER – THE CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST**

*Leviticus 23:4-5 'These are the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times. 5 On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the LORD's Passover.*

Passover is Israel's feast of deliverance that comes from Exodus 12. The blood of the lamb was applied to the door by faith, their firstborn sons were safe. This was "the Lord's passover" and the only means of deliverance that He provided that awesome night when the death angel visited Egypt. To reject the blood of the lamb was to accept judgment and death. Of course, the lamb typified Jesus Christ, who shed His blood on the cross for a world of lost sinners.

The firstborn Jews in Egypt weren't saved from death by admiring the lamb, caring for the lamb, or loving the lamb. The lamb had to be slain, and the blood applied to the doorposts of each Jewish house by faith. We aren't saved by Christ the Example or Christ the Teacher. We're saved by Christ the Atoning Sacrifice, who gave His life in our own behalf on the cross at the same hour the Passover lambs were being slain at the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.

No outsider was permitted to eat the Passover feast. The Jews had to be either born into the family or purchased, and the men had to bear on their body the mark of the covenant. Those who have never trusted Jesus Christ can't "feast" on Him through the Word and find the strength they need for the journey of life. Only somebody born into God's family through faith in Christ, purchased by His blood and marked by the Holy Spirit as a child of the New Covenant, can appropriate Jesus Christ through the Word and "feed" on Him.

Passover was the beginning of the Jewish religious year. And when sinners trust Christ, it marks for them a new beginning in a new life.

When would be the first month that was mentioned here? According to their calendar is the month of Nisan which is April for us.

## **C. THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD – THE FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST THROUGH HIS DEATH**

*Leviticus 23:6-8 And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. 7 On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it. 8 But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD for seven days. The seventh day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it."*

For seven days following Passover in the month of Nisan, the Jews ate only unleavened bread with their meals, and they carefully cleansed all the yeast out of their homes. In many places in Scripture, leaven depicts sin. In other words, the putting away of leaven illustrates the cleansing of one's life after he or she has been saved through faith in the blood of Jesus.

The Jewish people weren't saved from death and bondage by getting rid of leaven but by applying the blood of the lamb by faith. People today think they'll be saved because they think that they are good or get rid of a bad habit, but they can never do what only the blood of Christ can do. Salvation is through the blood of Christ alone, the sinless Lamb of God.

## **D. THE FEAST OF FIRSTFRUITS – THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST**

*Leviticus 23:9-14* And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 10 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. 11 He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. 14 You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

The priest took the first sheaf of barley from the field and waved it as an offering before the Lord. It was a token that the first and the best belonged to God, and it was done before Israel reaped the harvest for themselves. It was also an expression of gratitude to the Lord for giving the harvest and supplying their daily bread. The Jews weren't allowed to eat of the harvest until the firstfruits had been given to the Lord.

Two basic truths emerge here:

- 1) God accepted the sheaf for the whole harvest, and because the Father God accepted Jesus Christ, we are accepted in Him.
- 2) The sheaf is like the harvest. The priest didn't wave palm branches to represent the barley harvest. He waved a sheaf of barley. As the firstfruits of the resurrection harvest, Jesus Christ is now what one day His people shall be. At the "resurrection harvest," we shall be like Him.

As I've mentioned before, Sabbath is Saturday to us. So the day after the Sabbath would be Sunday. This is important because Jesus Christ arose from the dead on the first day of the week which is Sunday.

## **E. THE FEAST OF PENTECOST – THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH**

*Leviticus 23:15-21* 'And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. 16 Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD. 17 You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the LORD.

This special day was also called "the Feast of Weeks," because it was celebrated seven weeks after firstfruits. The word "Pentecost" means "fiftieth," and since the feast was held seven weeks after firstfruits, it, too, was on the first day of the week, the Lord's Day.

After the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, He showed Himself alive for forty days. Then, just before He ascended into heaven, He said to them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father. Ten days later, on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit of God came upon them as it is mentioned in Acts 2.

For the first time you see here that God told them to bring two loaves of bread which were baked with leaven. Yes, with leaven which represents sins. Why would God allow the Jews to include leaven? It is because the two loaves represent the church that combined the Jews and the Gentiles with their sins. The church will not be holy and without blemish until it sees the Lord in glory in heaven.

The feast lasted only one day. This event would have marked the end of the wheat harvest, and the Jews were commanded to remember the poor as they harvested the grain God had generously given them.

## **F. THE FEAST OF TRUMPET – ISRAEL BROUGHT BACK INTO THE LAND**

*Leviticus 23:23-25 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 24 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. 25 You shall do no customary work on it; and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD.'"*

Following the Feast of Pentecost, there's a four-month gap on God's calendar before the next feast. This gap could represent the age we're now in, the age of the church, during which we should be devotedly involved in the harvest and eagerly waiting for the sound of the trumpet. The final three feasts were celebrated in the seventh month, our modern September and October.

According to the Book of Numbers 10:1-10, the priests blew the silver trumpets for three occasions: to call the people together, to announce war, and to announce special times. The Feast of Trumpets was held on the first day of the seventh month and ushered in the new Jewish year – Rosh Hashanah, "the head of the year".

The trumpets were blown seven times to get the ancient Jews on the march. There are seven trumpets in the Revelation which cover the Great Tribulation Period and which will see Israel restored to the land for the kingdom age.

*Matthew 24:31 And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

During this time of the Great Tribulation, the church will be in heaven with the Lord. The people who are on earth will hear the seven trumpet sounds that bring forth God's judgements more vicious and thorough than anyone can possibly imagine.

## **G. THE DAY OF ATONEMENT – YOM KIPPUR – FORGIVENESS**

*Leviticus 23:26-32 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 27 "Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. 28 And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God.*

We covered the Day of Atonement in chapter 16. If you'd like to hear it again or study more, you can visit our church web site or get a CD from the Chapel Bookstore.

The emphasis is on the people afflicting their souls – fasting, praying, confessing sin and abstaining from all work.

As we learned before, there's also a prophetic message to the Day of Atonement. After Israel is gathered to her land, the Jews will see their rejected Messiah, repent of their sins and be cleansed according to Zech. 12:10-13:1.

## **H. THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES – THE JOY OF THE LORD**

*Leviticus 23:33-44 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 34 "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the LORD.*

*41 You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. 42 You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, 43 that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”*

I think the ancient Jews were like the US federal government, bank or Raytheon employees. They had special holidays every time they turn around.

This is the third feast in the seventh month. It was both a memorial and a prophetic feast. It was a time to rejoice in God’s deliverance and provision for Israel during the time of wilderness wandering.

At the same time it has a prophetic meaning. The nation of Israel is not only a scattered people and a sinful people, but they’re also a suffering people. No nation in history has suffered as the Jews have suffered, but one day their suffering will be turned into glory and joy.

This feast is also known as the Feast of Booths because once they used to live in booths and tents in the wilderness. It also pictures the future kingdom God has prepared for Israel when their Messiah returns and they receive Him in Zech. 12:10-13:1.

For Israel, the best is yet to come. The scattered people will be gathered; the sinful people will be cleansed; the sorrowing people will rejoice. And for Christian believers, the best is yet to come. For we shall be together with the Lord and His people, every stain washed away, rejoicing in His presence.

The group of the first four feasts relate to the work of Jesus in His first coming, of His earthly ministry.

1. Passover – The crucifixion and death of Christ
2. Unleavened Bread – The fellowship with Christ through His death
3. Firstfruits – The resurrection of Christ
4. Pentecost – The beginning of the church

The second group of the last three feasts relate to events connected with the second coming of Jesus.

5. Trumpets – Israel brought back into the land
6. Great Day of Atonement – Forgiveness
7. Tabernacles – The joy of the Lord

## **I. INTERESTING POINTS**

Jesus was actually crucified on the Passover according to John 19. His body would have been buried, and His holy and pure sacrifice acknowledged by God the Father during the Feast of Unleavened Bread following, and He would have risen from the dead on Firstfruits, the day after Passover’s Sabbath. Additionally, the church was founded on the actual day of Pentecost.

For this reason, many speculate it would be consistent for God to gather His people to Himself at the rapture on the day of the feast of trumpets – on the Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah. This can certainly be regarded as a possibility.