

Lesson 5: ISRAEL'S MEMORIAL FEASTS Leviticus 23.

AIM: To consider the Memorial Feasts of Israel and their relationship to Jesus Christ and his Memorial Feast.

1. BACKGROUND

The Children of Israel were instructed to meet together at certain times of the year to keep feasts. These were not feasts for merriment in eating and drinking. The people were to meet together to praise God and remember what He had done for them. They were to be real Holy Days. They were to be regarded as times of rejoicing, worship and sacrifice (Deut. 16:14). There were seven occasions, including the Day of Atonement. We shall consider only the special characteristics of each feast and their spiritual lessons.

- First Month: the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread & the Feast of the First Fruits
- Third Month: the Feast of Pentecost, or Weeks
- Seventh Month: the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement & the Feast of Tabernacles

2. THE PASSOVER Lev. 23

This feast was to remind Israel of the great occasion of their deliverance from Egypt and their birth as a nation. Exod. 12:1-13 contains the details of the original Passover in anticipation of deliverance. Ever afterwards it would be a memorial, although Deut. 16:5-7 indicates that in the Land there would be some changes made in the manner of its observance.

The Israelites were to keep this memorial every year. They were required to select an unblemished Lamb on the 10th day of the first month, the month of Abib. On the 14th day they were to roast and eat the lamb in the manner appointed. It was a night of watching (implying prayer to the Lord). Exod. 12:42, R.V.mg.

- Israel had been redeemed by the blood of the lamb (typifying Jesus).
- The lamb was without blemish and its blood had been used to save Israel in the way that God had commanded.
- They had been saved by the power of God from the might of the Egyptians to receive the inheritance promised to their ancestors. (Exod. 12:37; Exod. 14).

3. THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD Lev. 23:6-8.

This feast occurred during the seven days immediately after the Passover, from the 15th to the 21st of the month of Abib. The people were to meet together, and offerings were to be made to God. During this time they were to eat unleavened bread. Unleavened bread, made without yeast, contains no fermentation as produced by the action of yeast.

Paul tells us that leaven represents wickedness, so unleavened bread represents a life free from malice and wickedness (I Cor. 5:6-8). This festival week of Unleavened Bread was to remind the Children of Israel that they were redeemed to be a separate people and should live holy lives. For us it's the same - first our redemption, then a holy walk, no longer serving sin.

4. THE FEAST OF THE FIRST FRUITS. Lev. 23:10-14

Included in the week of the feast of Unleavened Bread was the feast of the First Fruits. Its celebration had to wait for entry into Canaan, because, in the wilderness, no harvests were reaped. The only food there was manna and quails. The first of the fruits to ripen was the barley. The first ripe ears of barley were to be gathered, made into a sheaf and brought to the priest as an offering to God. The people were not to eat either bread or ears of barley until the first had been given to God.

This was an act of thanksgiving to remind the people of God's goodness to them in providing them with the necessities of life. It drew attention also to His power exerted on their behalf against Egypt. Being the first fruits it was suggestive of the good things to come, the full harvest given by God (Deut. 26:2, 9-11).

Typically, this feast reminds us of the resurrection. Jesus was the first to rise from the dead, and is therefore known as the "first fruits" of them that are dead. Later, when the resurrection occurs, there will be a further harvest and many of the dead will be made alive again and the faithful will be given eternal life. (I Cor.15: 20-23)

5. THE FEAST OF PENTECOST. Lev. 23:15-22

This feast was held 50 days after the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread. It was sometimes called the feast of Weeks, because seven weeks were counted from the feast of First Fruits. During these weeks the wheat had ripened for harvest, so that at this festival the people thanked God for the grain harvest.

Two loaves of bread made with fine flour and leaven were to be brought to the priests as an offering to God. Also as an act of gratitude they were not to wholly reap their harvests, but were to leave the corners of the fields and the gleanings for the poor (the gleanings were the ears of corn missed by the harvesters when they went over the crops the first time). The differences between the offerings of First Fruits and Pentecost should be noted. The former offering was of barley, the latter of wheat; the former consisted of a sheaf (no leaven), the latter of loaves with leaven. The sheaf is typical of Jesus; the loaves are suggestive of the ecclesia. On the first day of Pentecost after Christ's ascension, when the Holy Spirit was bestowed on the disciples (Acts 2), many believers were joined in fellowship. As bread is composed of many particles of flour formed into a complete unit or loaf, so the ecclesia was formed into an organization out of separate disciples. (1 Cor. 12:12, 20; 10:17)

6. THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS. Lev. 23:23-25; Matt. 24:31

This feast was held on the first day of the seventh month. It was a full day of blowing of trumpets by the priests, announcing the new month and the approach of the great Day of Atonement on the tenth day of this month. The year of Jubilee was reckoned from the tenth day of the seventh month to the following year. It pointed forward to gathering (Num. 10:1-10), both of scattered Israel to their land and of spiritual Israel to the resurrection (Matt. 24:31). Read the following references and notice how the blowing of a trumpet is associated with the restoration of Israel (Isa. 27:13; Joel 2:1, 15). The receiving again of Israel means life for mankind. (Rom.11:15)

Our hope is the Hope of Israel. We wait for the time when the "trump of God" will sound to call His elect, or faithful ones, to Him (I Cor.15:52; I Thess. 4:16-17). Following this, all Israel will be restored to their own land and accept Christ as their Messiah.

7. THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES. Lev. 23:34-44

This festival was also called the Feast of Ingathering because it fell in the autumn when the full harvest of corn, wine and oil had been gathered in. It was the last great feast of the year and was observed from the 15th to the 22nd day of the seventh month. It was a time of rejoicing and thanksgiving when Israel showed their gratitude to God and remembered that He had delivered them from Egyptian bondage and had brought them into a land, which produced so many good things. It came five days after the Day of Atonement when the sin of the people had been removed. During the seven days of the feast the people lived in booths or tents (hence the name "tabernacles") made with boughs of trees (Lev. 23:40-43; Neh. 8:14-17). It would remind them of the 40 years in the wilderness when they lived in tents, the only practical accommodation that started when they left Egypt and came to Succoth. (Gen. 33: 17; Exod.13:20) This feast pointed forward to the full harvest and the result of Christ's work during the Millennium. In token of this the whole earth will rejoice with Israel and keep the feast of Tabernacles. (Zech.14:16-19).

8. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Our one memorial feast of the bread and wine, instituted by Jesus, involves for us all that the festivals held for Israel.

- The Passover: In sharing the bread and wine, we remember that we have been redeemed by the blood of Christ (I Pet. 1:19) and can be given eternal life by the power of the risen Christ (Phil. 3:10, 21).
- The Feast of Unleavened Bread: We realize our responsibilities and should endeavour to lead holy lives, purging out the leaven of malice and wickedness.
- The Feast of First Fruits: We are again reminded that Christ is the first fruits of them that sleep. He is the only one to have risen from the dead, never more to die.
- The Feast of Pentecost: We desire to be in the harvest of those who are Christ's at his coming.
- The Feast of Trumpets: We know that we are mortal, and that life is short. The time will come when the trumpet will sound and we will be judged by Christ. We need to prepare (I Cor. 14:8).
- The Feast of Tabernacles: We look forward to the time of rejoicing with Christ in His Kingdom.

REFERENCE LIBRARY

"The Law of Moses", chapter 21.

"Law and Grace", chapter 10.

"Seasons of Comfort", page 6.

QUESTIONS

1. Briefly outline the Memorial Feasts of Israel.
2. Choose one of the Feasts and consider its application to followers of Christ.
3. Discuss the significance of the Memorial Feast, which followers of Christ must keep.