

The Feasts of the Lord: The Resurrection - Jesus in the Feast of First Fruits

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Introduction

This is the third in the series examining the feasts of the Lord. We saw that the first two feasts, Passover and Unleavened bread, had their Messianic fulfillment in the death and burial of the Lord Jesus. Any ideas what event this feast, first fruits, would then speak of? Ok, so it's best I don't give away prizes for getting this one right because it is hopefully pretty straight forward! The feast of first fruits is all about the resurrection of Jesus. Like the first two feasts, we shall find that God is very specific again on the day that this should be celebrated and for good reason as we shall see. So like the previous studies we will examine the biblical account and commands concerning this festival as well as the personal and Messianic fulfillments. Let's start with the Bible account that is given in Leviticus.

The Biblical commands concerning the feast

Leviticus 23:9-14 The LORD said to Moses, (10) Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. (11) He is to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath. (12) On the day you wave the sheaf, you must sacrifice as a burnt offering to the LORD a lamb a year old without defect, (13) together with its grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil--an offering made to the LORD by fire, a pleasing aroma--and its drink offering of a quarter of a hin of wine. (14) You must not eat any bread, or roasted or new grain, until the very day you bring this offering to your God. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live.

The feast of Firstfruits has been called by a few different names. It's Hebrew name is 'Reshit Ketzivchem' which means 'the fruit of your harvest'. It is also known as the 'Feast of Omer' and the 'Feast of the Wave-sheaf'.¹ The feasts of God are based around different harvest times.



The barley harvest arrived first in the March/April period. So this feast of the firstfruits was to do with the barley harvest. Then came the wheat harvest normally around May and was associated with the feast of weeks (Pentecost). Finally

the fruit harvest (grapes, figs, pomegranates etc.) came later around September and were associated with the fall feasts. So God instructed the Israelites that before reaping the barley harvest they were to take a sheaf of the first grain to the priest who would wave it before the Lord. As they waved the firstfruits to the left and the right, it was symbolising that this sheaf that they had represented the entire crop. Until they did this the rest of their crop was not 'kosher' (acceptable). They did this to acknowledge and thank the Lord for the coming harvest and to ask His blessing upon it. It was to be a joyous occasion trusting that the One who gave them the firstfruits would also bless the full harvest. As well as waving the sheaf before the Lord, they were to offer a burnt offering and a drink offering. They were not to eat bread or continue the harvest until this offering of the firstfruits had been made to the Lord.

Now there was a specific day on which they were to do this. No date is given (as is given in several of the other feasts) but following the feast of Unleavened Bread this feast was to occur 'on the day after the Sabbath'. So this feast was to occur on the first day of the week after Passover/Unleavened Bread.

The Messianic Fulfillment

We are not left in any doubt as to how this feast was fulfilled by Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul tells us clearly:

*1 Corinthians 15:20-23 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, **the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.** (21) For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. (22) For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. (23) But each in his own turn: **Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.***



Christ fulfilled the feast of firstfruits by being the firstfruits of the resurrection. Others in the Bible (such as Lazarus and Jairus' daughter) had been raised from the dead prior to Christ's resurrection but they were resurrected back into their old bodies which would eventually die again. Jesus was the first to be raised into a new resurrection body, never to die again! So He is the 'sheaf', the first of the harvest, that is waved before the Lord in celebration and with thanksgiving. In his book 'Thus shalt thou serve' C.W Slemming writes this little interesting point: *'When the sheaves were cut from the fields and carried to the city, small vacant spots were left behind. When the Lord rose from the dead, He left behind Him a small vacant spot, which still remains as a reminder of His resurrection - it is an empty tomb!'*

And just as the sheaf was waved to represent the entire harvest to the left and the right, so the resurrection of Jesus was not just for Himself. He represented the many that 'shall come from the east and the west' (Mat 8:11) to faith in Him and be raised from the dead as well! As the

offerings that were made on the feast of firstfruits were a sweet savor to God², how much greater was the sweetness on the day Jesus rose from the dead? Corresponding to the fact that the crop was not kosher until the firstfruits were waved before God, so it took the resurrection of the Jesus to make us acceptable to God - *Romans 4:25 'He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.'* Or, as Paul said: *1 Corinthians 15:17 'And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.'*

But thank God that death could not hold Him down! And what of the day that this was to happen? We read above that this wave offering before the Lord of the firstfruits was to occur 'the day after the Sabbath'. This is the first day of the week - Sunday - The day that Jesus rose from the dead!³

Mark 16:9 Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene...'⁴

A closer look at the date of resurrection - The Mystery of the 17th

I have previously written a study on '[The mystery of the 17th](#)' based on the interesting events that have occurred on this day in the Old Testament. I would like to give a quick summary of these events here for they are all linked and are types of this day that Jesus was raised. So to quickly recap, the Passover lambs were sacrificed on the 14th Nisan. This is the day Jesus died. The feast of unleavened bread started the next day, on the 15th Nisan. This was when Jesus was buried in the tomb. The day after the Sabbath was the feast of firstfruits - this was the 17th Nisan. Which brings us to our question...Apart from the feast of firstfruits, what other events occurred on this day and what do they have to do with 'resurrection'? Argh... now you are asking the right kind of questions!

- Noah's ark comes through the waters and rests on the earth for the first time bringing new life to Noah and his family on the 17th of Nisan. (Gen 8:4)⁵ Coming through the waters and resting on dry land was a picture of the resurrection. Noah and his family were the firstfruits of what would be a whole new life!
- Israel came through the Red Sea on the 17th of Nisan having left at Passover on the 14th. (Chumney, 'The seven festivals of the Messiah', page 70). For them this was death to their old life (with the drowning of the Egyptians) and resurrection to a new life in God on the 17th!
- The manna which had fed the nation of Israel for the 40 years in the wilderness stopped on the 16th of Nisan and from the 17th onwards Israel feasted on the new grain of the promised land (Josh 5:10-12). This again is a picture of the new life in the Promised Land that came on the 17th!
- The death sentence hung over the entire Israelite nation as their sworn enemy, Haman, had convinced the king to sign a decree to destroy them (Esther 3:1-12). The decree went out on the 13th Nisan (Esther 3:12). Esther then proclaimed a three day fast (Esther 4:16) for the 14th, 15th and 16th. On the 3rd day (5:1) Esther approached the king saying to herself 'If I perish, I perish!' (an attitude of death or resurrection... it's in God's hands!) On the 17th Nisan, the tables were turned on the enemy Haman and instead of the Jews being destroyed, his own life was taken! Again, a picture of life out death on this amazing day!

The personal fulfillment of Firstfruits

The good thing about the word 'firstfruits' is the word 'first'. If there is a first, then there will be others that follow. Hopefully that includes you! This is what Paul was teaching in the Corinthian passage quoted above. Have a look at it again:

*1 Corinthians 15:20-23 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, **the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep**. (21) For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. (22) For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. (23) But each in his own turn: **Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.***

Paul is reminding us that Jesus' resurrection is a guarantee of our resurrection (as long as we belong to Him!) He has been raised and has a new resurrection body but the same will happen to all that are His at the right time. And that right time is the return of Jesus Christ for His bride. This will be covered in a lot more detail in the 'Feast of Trumpets'. Using the imagery of a grain of wheat going down into the ground Jesus said:

John 12:24 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

Believers in Jesus Christ are the many 'seeds' that He spoke about. He fell into the ground and died but He didn't remain there! He rose up again and in like manner, the 'many seeds' - those that believe in Him, will do likewise. And they will have a new body like unto His new body.

1 Corinthians 15:41-44 The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. (42) So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; (43) it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; (44) it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

But we shouldn't just think that we are to wait until His return to have new life. No. The personal aspect of firstfruits reminds us that we are new creations now. Yes, we still live in a fallen world in a fallen body so, just as you may have possibly experienced, that brings with it one, two or a few thousand issues with it... But praise God that believers in Him have been born again, are a new creation in Him, and have been given the Holy Spirit to be in us what we are not. And even this gift of the Spirit is mentioned in terms of being a 'firstfruits'. There is so much more still to come!

Romans 8:22-23 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. (23) Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

We are new creations with the Spirit of God. In light of this, our personal response and fulfillment of this feast is be 'consecrated' unto Him and offer ourselves back to the Lord for His use.

Romans 6:13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.

At the personal level, the feast of Unleavened Bread spoke of being separated FROM sin/leaven. The feast of firstfruits speaks of being separated UNTO the Lord (consecrated).

A further look at the harvests

As mentioned earlier, the three main harvest in Israel revolved around the barley, wheat and fruit harvests. Norton (Unlocking the secrets of the feasts, page 40,41) sees a parallel here with the three main spiritual harvests throughout the ages.

- The barley harvest came first where they use a process called winnowing to toss the barley kernels into the wind to separate the kernel from the chaff. Norton writes: *'The head of the barley is very soft and easily crushed. This reminds me of the birth of the church at Pentecost where the Holy Spirit came like a wind and indwelt believers as reported in Acts 2:1-2... In the order of the resurrections, the church is first to be resurrected, just as the barley is the first to be harvested.'*
- The wheat harvest was next. Norton writes *'Since the head of the wheat is hard, it must be threshed or crushed to separate the wheat from the chaff. A man who is threshing the wheat stands on a large board, which has bits of glass underneath it, and is pulled by a horse over the wheat to do the crushing. I found it quite telling that the board is called by a Latin word: "tribulum". Many people, including Jews, will come to Christ in the tribulation⁶, as noted in Revelation 7:9—14. It is interesting that you can also tell the difference between a field of wheat and a field of barley. While the heads of the stalk of barley bend down like they are bowing in humility (see picture above), the heads of the stalks of wheat stay straight up. I am reminded of Deuteronomy 31:27 where Moses said to the children of Israel: 'For I know your rebellion and your stiff neck. If today, while I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious against the Lord, then how much more after my death?' The church will be resurrected first (the barley), while those who become believers in the tribulation (the wheat) shall be resurrected during the tribulation if they die in that period. In a sense they were harvested under the crushing of the "tribulum".'*
- Finally we have the fruit harvest in the Autumn (Fall) season. This is the last of the harvests and in scripture applies to unbelievers. Revelation speaks in graphic detail of this harvest unto judgement. We read: *Revelation 14:15-20 And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe." ... (18) Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe." (19) So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. (20) And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.*

Conclusion

Previously we have looked at how the feasts have portrayed the death and burial of Jesus. But this feast of Firstfruits celebrates, through the priest waving the sheaf before the Lord, the glorious resurrection of the Lord. Because He was accepted, so are all those in Him. Because He was resurrected, so will those who belong to Him. Don't you think it is amazing truth that

God has hidden in each of these feasts? I certainly do. God has laid out the plan for the seven major events of human history! The next feast is equally as instructive for it outlines the exact day on which the Holy Spirit will come and indwell the bride of Christ.

1. Taken from Arnold Fructenbaum's study pamphlet on the Feasts of Israel. ↵
2. A.C Gaebelein in his commentary on Leviticus 23 writes the following concerning the offerings that were made along with the wave offering of the firstfruits: *'In connection with the waving of the sheaf of firstfruits there were offerings. But of what kind? "A he lamb without blemish for a burnt offering unto the LORD," a meal offering and a drink offering. No sin offering was demanded, for that was accomplished when He died. The offerings were a sweet savour, telling forth once more the blessedness and value of His own person and work. And in Him we are accepted; with Him the firstfruits we shall be forever.'* ↵
3. I have met people, and have had people email in to the website, that believe Jesus rose on the Saturday. Those that believe this usually believe that He died on the previous Wednesday and can't really have him rising on the Sunday for that would then be four nights in the grave instead of three. As well as the scripture indicated in Mark that specifically says He was raised on the first day of the week (Sunday) it is useful to point out the prophetic type that is before us today. The feast of firstfruits, God said, was to be waved on the day after the Sabbath. If Jesus rose on Saturday, the Sabbath, then that would have been the day that God instructed the feast of firstfruits to be celebrated on. But it wasn't. It was Sunday, the first day of the week. The first day of the new week speaks of the start of something new. it speaks of the resurrection unto new life. It speaks of the new creation. Jesus' resurrection was not to be associated with the first first week of creation (which it would have been if He rose on the seventh day) but on what we could call 'the 8th day' - a new creation by God. ↵
4. Concerning Mary's post resurrection encounter with Jesus, Michael Norton writes in his book 'Unlocking the secrets of the feasts' about another parallel with Christ that is explained through knowledge of the firstfruits: *'We immediately observe another thing in John 20:17, which had always puzzled me. When Mary recognized the resurrected Lord, He tells her, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." I never fully understood why He said that to Mary. Why couldn't she touch Him? I discovered the reason when I read what Flavius Josephus wrote about the barley. He explained that the Jews could not touch the barley before the day of firstfruits. Once the barley sheaf was presented to God by the priest, the barley crop could be harvested for use. Since Jesus was the Firstfruits, He had to go to the Father before anyone could touch Him. We see that after He had been to the Father and back, Thomas could touch Him. As John 20:27 states, "Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; and he not unbelieving, but believing.'* ↵
5. Please note that Genesis uses the civil calendar. The 'religious' calendar was not given until the time of the Exodus (Exodus 12:1). So Genesis speaks of the seventh month and the seventeenth day. This is the exact same day as what in the religious calendar God said should be their first month. In other words, this is Nisan 17th - the day Jesus was raised from the dead. ↵
6. It is interesting and worth noting that if the wheat harvest is to symbolise those who come to the Lord through the tribulation then the Bible tells us who are the first in this harvest. In Revelation chapter 14, speaking of the 144,000 Jews from the 12 tribes of Israel are called the 'firstfruits unto God' (Rev 14:4). In what sense could they possibly be firstfruits when Jesus and the early believers are called firstfruits (James 1:18) and these 144,000 believers come to the Lord over 2000 years later? Only in the sense that the tribulation period, also known as Daniel's 70th week, is a distinct period set apart from the current church age of grace. They

are the firstfruits of the tribulation period. The firstfruits of the wheat harvest that requires the 'tribulum' to bring them in. [↩](#)