

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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A Study of Scripture Sevens: The Feasts of Jehovah Part 1 - Leviticus 23:4-22

Today we begin a new series of six talks which will look at three sets of scriptural sevens. The three sevens we shall look at are:

1. The Feasts of Jehovah - Leviticus 23:4-44;
2. The Parables of the Kingdom - Matthew 13:1-52;
3. The Addresses to the Churches - Revelation 2:1-3:22.

The late Dr. Wolston, I understand, said something along these lines, "Until you have made a study of these three sevens, you will never know where you are in the dispensational ways of God" (*My Feasts*, by George Davison).

For some listeners these things may be quite familiar but perhaps others may not have considered them before. Either way I trust that this series will be a real encouragement to all. Perhaps in this day of great uncertainties, it is especially important to see that God has a plan, and nothing or no-one will stop Him from bringing it to pass. Seven being an odd number cannot be split evenly; however these three sets of seven would appear to divide into fours and threes according to the revelation of the truth of God.

The feasts of Jehovah given to Israel would appear to split happily into four and three. As we look at these in turn, we will see that the first four have their fulfilment in Christianity and the last three await their fulfilment in a repentant Israel after the Church is raptured. The first three feasts were held in the first month and the fourth in the third month of the year and then there was a gap of three full months before the last three were held in the seventh month.

When we come to the seven parables of the kingdom, we will see that the first four, which were spoken by Jesus outside the house to the multitude, tell of the outward, visible aspects of the kingdom of the heavens. The last three spoken inside the house to the disciples, would instruct about the inward, less seen aspects of the kingdom but nevertheless those which are of great value to Christ.

Looking at the addresses given by Christ to the seven churches of Asia, we will see that from Ephesus to Laodicea there is a remarkably accurate portrayal of the history of the church period. Here we suggest the split is more three and four. The conditions found in the first three are historical whilst the conditions of the last four are with us today, and will be till the end of the church period.

Turning now to Leviticus 23, we will find instruction concerning all seven of these feasts or festivals as perhaps we would call them today. Even the casual reader of these verses will note the carefully given detail in relation to these "holy convocations" or sacred gatherings of God's people. Most of these feasts were held on one day but two were "week-long" feasts. This is important as we shall see in our consideration of the feast of unleavened bread and the feast of tabernacles.

Really, there are eight feasts spoken of in Leviticus 23, but the Sabbath stands separate from the other seven. The seven were annual feasts, held once a year, but the Sabbath was observed weekly. After God saw that everything He created was "very good", He rested from His labours. His Sabbath was declared, but when sin entered God's fair creation, this rest was spoiled. When here on earth the Lord Jesus said, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work" (John 5:17). However, God's Sabbath rest will be enjoyed in a coming day as all that was lost "in Adam" was recovered "in Christ". Leviticus 23 begins with the Sabbath and perhaps in the truth of the seven feasts which follow we get the mind of God as to how His Sabbath will be brought about. So the two prominent thoughts in Leviticus 23 are God's purpose to establish His rest, and His desire for His people to be gathered to Himself.

Feast of Passover (Leviticus 23:4-5)

In Leviticus 23:5 we read, "In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD'S passover". The passover was the great beginning for Israel. Although they had their "secular calendar", this was the beginning of their "sacred calendar". It all began in Egypt on that night when the first-born of all the land of Egypt was slain. In Exodus 12, we

read how God delivered His people out of the hand of Pharaoh and the Egyptian taskmasters. God's message to Pharaoh was, "Let my people go that they may serve me", (Exodus 7:16; 8:1, 8:20; 9:1, 9:13; 10:3) but he refused. Even the plagues (Exodus 7:14-10:29) which were brought upon him and his people had not caused him to change his mind. Now, finally, God would speak in awful judgment, and by the hand of the destroying angel all the first-born of the land of Egypt, both man and beast, would die (Exodus 12:12). How were God's people to be spared this judgment? The answer, of course, was the blood of the lamb (Exodus 12:13). I trust at least some of you said "Hallelujah" to that! Can we consider the blood of that Paschal Lamb without our thoughts running forward to the words of John the Baptist as he looked on Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God" (John 1:29, 36)?

Moses had instructed the people that "this month" (which was the month of Abib - or April) was to be a new beginning for them (Exodus 12:2) and in this first feast of Jehovah we have a most wonderful type, or picture, of the death of Christ as the basis of all our blessings Godward. That lamb (which was without blemish) was kept from the tenth to the fourteenth day, then slain (Exodus 12:3-6). The blood was taken and, just as God had instructed, it was applied to the posts of the door and the lintel above the door (Exodus 12:7). What powerful words, which echo through the ages, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exodus 12:13). What wonderful salvation! The hymn writer, LE Jones (1865-1936) asks the question - "Would you be free from your burden of sin?" And the answer is immediately given, "There's power in the blood..."

Sheltered by the blood, they were on the march to the promised land. Perhaps as many as two million men, women and children with all their cattle and possessions left Egypt that night, but it wasn't long before Pharaoh had changed his mind (Exodus 14:5) and went after them, trapping them at the Red Sea. Moses cried, "Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD" (Exodus 14:13) and the Red Sea was parted in two (Exodus 14:21). The Israelites crossed over on dry land (Exodus 14:22), but when the Egyptian armies followed them, the waters rolled back and they perished (Exodus 14:23). Then the people sang, "The LORD has triumphed gloriously!" (Exodus 15:1), and we can sing the song of the redeemed too!

So in the feast of the passover the congregation of Israel remembered that awesome night and their God given deliverance. As the people of God today, we, too, remember. You will recall how that after keeping the Passover with His disciples, the Lord Jesus instituted His supper (Luke 22:14-23). As we break bread each Lord's Day, we remember Him in His death (Luke 22:19, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26) and what better way could there be to start each new week!

Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:6-8)

In Leviticus 23:6-8 we read, "And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread. In the first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD seven days: in the seventh day is an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein".

Here we have the instruction given for the feast of unleavened bread. This second feast followed immediately after the passover and was therefore viewed as flowing out of the passover. Perhaps we could think of this feast as a response - an answer by the people of God to the passover. The feast of unleavened bread was a seven day feast. Leaven, or yeast, in the Bible always speaks of evil, and so the main thought in this feast is holiness. Twice in his epistles, Paul speaks of the corrupting influence of leaven (1 Corinthians 5:6-9; Galatians 5:9). In Corinth it was a matter of moral evil (1 Corinthians 5:8) and in Galatia it was doctrinal evil (Galatians 5:9). How careful we need to be that we do not allow evil in our lives. The Israelites were to eat unleavened bread and to offer an "offering by fire unto the LORD" for these seven days (Leviticus 23:36). These instructions were neither complicated nor hard to follow but they did require absolute obedience. With nothing evil in their lives, the people of God are able to offer worship to God which ascends to Him as a "sweet savour". So closely linked were these two feasts that the Apostle Paul when writing to the believers at Corinth said, "For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:7-8). Referring back to the fact that this feast was for seven days, no doubt we are intended to understand that God wants holiness displayed in the everyday lives of His people. Not only will this be for God's glory, but it will be for our blessing. Surely this is the mind of God: that seven days of holy, pure and worshipful lives would take us through each week - Lord's Day to Lord's Day.

Feast of Firstfruits (Leviticus 23:9-14)

From Leviticus 23:9-14 we read, "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it. And ye shall offer that day when ye wave the sheaf an he lamb without blemish of the first year for a burnt offering unto the LORD. And the meat offering thereof

shall be two tenth deals of fine flour mingled with oil, an offering made by fire unto the LORD for a sweet savour: and the drink offering thereof shall be of wine, the fourth part of an hin. And ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until the selfsame day that ye have brought an offering unto your God: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings”.

This third feast of Jehovah, the feast of firstfruits, is now detailed for the children of Israel. Note that while the passover and unleavened bread were celebrated in the wilderness, this feast was to be held in the land of Canaan, the promised land, the land over Jordan, the land of milk and honey. Surely this would show us that our blessings are centred in a risen Man, a Man on the other side of death, seated at God’s right hand in heaven. The harvest spoken of in Leviticus 23:10 is the barley harvest, which was before the wheat harvest and, in a unique way, speaks of Christ in resurrection. The barley sheaf, waved or presented before the LORD by the priest spoke to God of the resurrection of Christ. It being waved on the day after the Sabbath would speak of the Lord’s Day - the resurrection day! The whole idea of firstfruits is that it was representative of the great harvest which would follow. “Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at His coming” 1 Corinthians 15:23. Leviticus 23:11 brings us to think about the wonder that we are accepted. As the Apostle Paul so beautifully puts it in his letter to the Ephesians, we are “accepted in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:6). The offering of the he lamb without blemish, the meal offering of fine flour mingled with oil and the drink offering of wine are again wonderful Old Testament pictures of Christ (Leviticus 23:11-12). The burnt offering brings to our attention the fact that there is an aspect of the death of Christ which was entirely for God. The meal offering brings to our attention many wonderful aspects of the perfect life of our blessed Lord which was surrendered to the cross of Calvary, poured out as a drink offering to God. Christ then is food for our souls, bread, parched corn and green ears. Reversing the order, perhaps the Lord’s life in this world, His death and His resurrection life is what is suggested in these three expressions.

In this feast of firstfruits then we have a wonderful type of Christ’s resurrection. Note, too, the accuracy of Scripture. We read that the Lord Jesus was crucified at the exact time of the passover and at the exact time of firstfruits, He rose again. He had conquered death and, as risen, He had become the “firstfruits of them that slept”, 1 Corinthians 15:20.

Feast of Weeks (Leviticus 23:15-22)

Now we come to the fourth feast of Jehovah which is the last one we will consider today. From Leviticus 23:15 we read, “And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD. Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals; they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the LORD. And ye shall offer with the bread seven lambs without blemish of the first year, and one young bullock, and two rams: they shall be for a burnt offering unto the LORD, with their meat offering, and their drink offerings, even an offering made by fire, of sweet savour unto the LORD. Then ye shall sacrifice one kid of the goats for a sin offering, and two lambs of the first year for a sacrifice of peace offerings. And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits for a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs: they shall be holy to the LORD for the priest. And ye shall proclaim on the selfsame day, that it may be an holy convocation unto you: ye shall do no servile work therein: it shall be a statute for ever in all your dwellings throughout your generations”. (Leviticus 23:15-21)

Leviticus 23:15-21 bring before us the feast of the New Meal Offering or the feast of Weeks. The Greek word “pentecoste” literally means “fiftieth” and so we often refer to this feast as the feast of Pentecost. Seven complete weeks plus a day gives us the fifty days spoken of in Leviticus 23:16 and as the feast of unleavened bread flowed out of the passover, we can see that the feast of firstfruits and Pentecost were linked together. From the day of the feast of first fruits, fifty days were counted to the feast of Pentecost, thus establishing the link.

In Acts 2:1-4, we read about the descent of the Holy Spirit and the formation of the church on the day of Pentecost. Fifty days after the resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit descended to indwell the believers just as Jesus had promised. In John 14, 15 and 16, we have the wonderful promise given to His disciples that the Holy Spirit would come to be a Comforter “of the very same kind” as He Himself had been to them. No wonder the Saviour could say in John 16:7, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you”. After His resurrection, the Lord had shown Himself to His own in the forty days before He ascended and in Acts 1:8, we read His last spoken words to them, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you”. Then He was taken up into heaven and the wonderful promise given that He would return in like manner.

The New Meal Offering was to be of two loaves, made of fine flour and baked with leaven. As with the sheaf of firstfruits, we read that burnt offerings, meal offerings and drink offerings were to accompany this wave offering. However note the instruction also given in relation to the sin offering and the peace or fellowship offering (Leviticus 23:18-19). There is a great amount of detail which we cannot go into now, but undoubtedly the most striking of these are the inclusion of leaven in these loaves and the sin offering. If we read in Leviticus 2:11, we will see that there was

no leaven to be connected with the meal offering and that it was a voluntary or free will offering. The sin offering was not! It was an obligatory offering because of the failure of the people to keep God's commandments. The New Meal Offering is not then to be viewed as a type of Christ but rather as a picture of ourselves. Although we are partakers of the divine nature and have the Spirit of Christ we know only too well that the sinful nature is still in us. As long as we are in this world, we have the capacity to sin and how we need the advocacy of Christ! The growth of the leaven had been arrested by the baking process, but nevertheless it was there and these two loaves were witness to that fact. However, the two tenth deals of fine flour would remind us that we are of Christ and that, by the indwelling Holy Spirit, the lovely moral glories which were seen perfectly in the lowly Jesus can be reproduced in our lives. We thought that the barley spoke in a unique way of the resurrection of Christ but what of this wheat flour? Our minds would go to John 12:24, where the Lord Jesus says, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit". As part of that vast redeemed company, the church, our association is even now with Christ, risen and seated together with Him in the heavenlies, but what a prospect awaits when our faith will be realised and we shall see Him face to face and be like Him and with Him for ever! Listen again to His request of His Father in John 17:24, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory". Wonderful, too, that "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied", Isaiah 53:11. Perhaps, then, the wheat would speak to our hearts of His heavenly glory.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18, we read of the hope of the Christian. We are waiting, and I trust watching, for the day when the Lord Himself will come for us. Until that day comes, there will be no fulfilment of these remaining three feasts of Jehovah, as doubtless their fulfilment rests in God dealing with Israel again after the Church is gone. However, we can be assured that God will indeed fulfil every word spoken in promise to the patriarchs of Israel.

May God bless you all.

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