

THE FEASTS OF THE LORD

Leviticus 23:1-44

Foreshadowing God's plan of the ages from the past eternity to the future eternity

by

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CHAPTER SIX

THE FEAST OF THE FIRSTFRUITS

(Leviticus 23:9-14)

1. A Memorial of Victory and Rest.

“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” (Leviticus 23:9-11).

We have seen in our outline glance at the seven feasts of the Lord that the feast of the firstfruits foreshadowed the resurrection of Christ, whom the Holy Spirit calls **“the firstfruits of them that slept”** (I Corinthians 15:20). That this is not mere fancy, we shall see as we look carefully at the details of the type and its fulfillment, considering them in the order in which they are presented to us in Leviticus 23:9-14.

And first of all we read that this feast was not to be observed by Israel until they reached the land of promise. Not so the feasts of the Passover and unleavened bread; they were to be kept in the wilderness. Every year for forty years, throughout the long, weary pilgrimage, God's people remembered their redemption from bondage on that first Passover night, and ate the unleavened bread.

But God told Moses that they were not to observe the feast of the firstfruits until they were in the land, whither they were journeying.

Now the sheaf of the firstfruits was a pledge or guarantee of a greater harvest; so **“Christ”** is **“the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming”** (I Corinthians 15:23). And His triumph over death and the grave is a guarantee or pledge that we, too, shall enter fully into His eternal rest and victory when we **“be come into the land,”** even heaven itself. Then there will be no more weary journeying; the full harvest will be gathered in; and we shall be forever with Christ in our glorious, resurrection bodies.

It will be a day of victory and rest—an eternal day.

2. *“Christ the Firstfruits”* (I Corinthians 15:23).

“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” (Leviticus 23:10, 11).

This was a single sheaf, even as Christ was the firstborn from among the dead. Moreover, the very name given to the risen Lord identifies Him as the fulfillment of the type: “Christ the firstfruits.”

The priest waved the single sheaf before the Lord as a pledge of a greater harvest; and Christ, in His bodily resurrection, is the guarantee that all who put their faith in Him as Saviour and Lord will be gathered unto Him **“at his coming.”** Nothing can prevent the resurrection of His saints; He is the firstfruits, the pledge! And even as the single sheaf was waved **“before the Lord”** and laid up, as it were, to remind Israel that the harvest was sure to follow, so the risen Christ is at the right hand of the throne of God; and because He lives, we too shall live!

3. *The Very Day of Christ's Resurrection was also foreshadowed in the feast of the firstfruits.*

Every one of the Gospel writers is careful to tell us plainly that He arose **“upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning,” “when the sabbath was fully past.”**

He was crucified on the Passover; and when the sabbath following the Passover was ended, **“Christ the firstfruits”** arose from the grave, in exact fulfillment of the type. **“On the morrow after the sabbath”** following the Passover, God had said to Moses, **“the priest shall wave . . . a sheaf of the firstfruits.”** And Jesus arose from the grave **“on the morrow after the sabbath.”**

On that Passover day nearly two thousand years ago the spiritually blind priest in Jerusalem killed the lamb and sprinkled the blood, not knowing that Calvary was God's altar, upon which the Lamb of God was offered **“once for all.”** (See Hebrews 13:10-13.)

And on that feast of the firstfruits which followed, the spiritually blind priest stood before the rent veil of the temple at Jerusalem, and waved a sheaf of the firstfruits, not knowing that The Great Reaper was waving the One Sheaf before Joseph's empty tomb! When the women found the stone rolled away, the first sheaf had already been reaped! And that is why the angel of the Lord could say unto them: **“Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said”** (Matthew 28:5, 6). How wonderfully Christ fulfilled the type, even to the very day!

4. *The Significance of the Two Offerings.*

We have seen earlier in this study that the burnt offering and the meal offering speak to us of the perfections and excellencies of the person of the Lord Jesus; and these two offerings were made on the day of the feast of the firstfruits. We have seen that even as the whole burnt offering went up to God as a sweet savour, so the Father was “well pleased” in the glories and excellencies of the Son throughout His earthly ministry—**“even unto death.”**

And we have seen that the mingling of the fine flour with the oil—without leaven—was a type of the perfect humanity of our Lord, lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, He was **“God manifest in the flesh”**—perfect Man and eternal God.

A careful reading of the first two chapters of Leviticus will show us yet other significant lessons to be learned from these two offerings. The frankincense used in connection with the meal offering speaks to us of the fragrance of the life of the Lord Jesus as He **“came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many”** (Mark 10:45).

Part of the meal offering was burned upon the altar; part, **“baken in the oven.”** Here we are reminded of the sufferings of Christ which were known to the world, and of those sufferings known only to the Father and to the Son. The world knew it when He was weary and hungry and despised and crucified; but **“in an oven,”** as it were—beyond the sight of human gaze—there was that bitter **“cup”** which only the Father could understand. Not even the holy angels could enter into His agony when He said, **“My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death”** (Matthew 26:38).

As the whole burnt offering foreshadowed the sacrifice of our Lord on the cross—in His whole personality, body, mind, and spirit—so the meal offering speaks to us of His humanity. And these two offerings were made on the feast of the firstfruits, by the express command of the Lord. Why? Because the same Lord who died as the Paschal Lamb arose in His glorified body on the very feast of the firstfruits nearly two thousand years ago.

Moreover, He is in the presence of the Father today in His resurrection body, not on the ground of His atoning work; we shall stand before Him unashamed on that basis alone; but He is there on the ground of His own person, on the ground of His moral excellencies. We have no excellencies of our own; but our crucified and risen Lord was and is and ever shall be the very embodiment of all that is **“true”** and **“honest”** and **“just”** and **“pure”** and **“lovely”** and **“of good report”** (Philippians 4:8).

In this connection, it is highly significant that the non-sweet savour offerings were not made on the feast of the firstfruits; for they speak to us of Christ as our Sin-Bearer, in His work for us on the cross. In the feast of the firstfruits we see, rather, His own beauty and glory as the sinless Son of Man, offering Himself without spot or blemish as the whole burnt offering, and raised again from the dead in His uncreated glory.

5. A Pledge of the Harvest.

“Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept . . . Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming” (I Corinthians 15:20, 23).

In His Incarnation Christ stood alone; but in His death and resurrection He is not alone. **“Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit”** (John 12:24).

“**A corn of wheat**” perfect in itself, if put in the ground, produces a whole ear— many grains, yet all united in the one ear. So also Christ, in His death and resurrection is the firstborn from among many brethren, all united into the one Body, which is His Church! He did not call His disciples His “**brethren**” until after He arose from the dead; but in His resurrection body He said to Mary: “**Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God**” (John 20:17). And these words are a pledge of the welcome which every true believer receives when he enters the presence of God.

Martin Luther once stood by the bedside of a dying reformer. “What are your plans?” Luther asked him, to which the saint replied, “I’m going on a long journey.” Again the questioner asked, “And what is your passport?” Once more the answer came, “My Forerunner has gone before me.” And then Luther said to him, “Go on your way; a warm welcome awaits you.”

My Christian friend, we have a “**hope . . . both sure and stedfast,**” for our “**forerunner . . . even Jesus**” has gone on before us. (See Hebrews 6:18-20). He is the “**firstfruits.**” “**Afterward**”— because of His own bodily resurrection—“**they that are his at his coming**” shall arise, forever to be with Him. The spirits of the saints who “**sleep in Jesus**” are even now in His presence, but their bodies are in the grave. When He comes for His Church, “**the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord**” (I Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

My unsaved friend, Christ is risen from the dead. You must stand before Him one day. Shall you meet Him as your Saviour, or shall you meet Him as your Judge? In your “**flesh**” you shall “**see God.**” It will be a time of rejoicing, or it will be a time of terrible anguish and eternal woe. Will you not trust Him now as your Passover Lamb and your risen Lord? Then only can you share with the Lord now and forever the feast of the firstfruits— His feast, and yours for the taking. Then only you may say with Paul, “**O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?**” (I Corinthians 15:55).

Some years ago two men lived in this country. They were born in the same year; they died in the same year. One was a leader of infidels; the other was the greatest evangelist of his day. One was Robert Ingersoll; the other was D. L. Moody. And each spoke at the funeral of a brother.

Robert Ingersoll loved his brother; his voice choked, and the tears came. He gave an eloquent oration, saying in part: “Life is a narrow veil between the dark, barren peaks of two eternities. We try to look beyond the heights. We cry aloud. But the only answer to our cry is the echo of our wail.”

D. L. Moody loved his brother also. He, too, shed tears. But he looked up by faith into the face of the Great Wave-Sheaf, “**Christ the firstfruits**” of a coming harvest, and said, in part: ““**O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?**” Goodbye, my brother. I’ll meet you in the morning.”

When Ingersoll died, his family was distracted.

But when Moody went to be with the Lord, his Christian friends and relatives could say of him, **“He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever”** (I John 2:17). And his last words were the expression of a **“desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better”** (Philippians 1:23) ; for this is what he said: “Heaven is opening; earth is receding; God is calling; I must be away.”

“If a man die, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14).

Yes, my brother; God's eternal Word says that there will be a **“resurrection of life”** and a **“resurrection of condemnation”** (John 5:29). Take Christ as your personal Saviour, and then you will be able to say with Job: **“I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another”** (Job 19:25-27).

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