

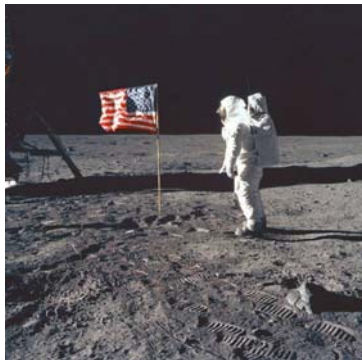
THE FEAST OF FIRSTFRUITS

Objectives:

- To identify some of the main components of the observance of the feast of Firstfruits.
- To gain an awareness of how this feast was observed during the time of Christ.
- To gain an understanding of how this feast applies to believers today.

(Approach)

We tend to remember first things--our first kiss, first date, first car, first house, etc. "We all remember that Neil Armstrong was the first man to walk on the moon, but can you remember the name of the second man to step onto the lunar surface? I can't. The first men to fly? *Orville and Wilbur Wright*. The first man to invent America's favorite lunch? *The Fourth Earl of Sandwich, in 1762*. The first machine gun? *Richard Jordan Gatling*, of course. The first man to raise Himself from the dead? *Jesus Christ, on the Feast of Firstfruits.*"¹



I. GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING THE FEAST OF FIRSTFRUITS

A. **This feast is the third feast in the 7-feast cycle.** Lev. 23:9-14 records God's instructions concerning this feast. **READ**

1. There is much debate as to when this feast is to be observed. Lev. 23:11 specifies that it is to be observed on "the day after the Sabbath." The question that fuels the debate is which "Sabbath" was God referring to? the weekly Sabbath? or the Holy-day Sabbath?

¹ Hagee, 1999, p. 66.

- a. If God meant the 7-day or weekly Sabbath, as the first century Sadducees believed, then the date of Firstfruits would vary from year to year, depending on what day Passover fell on.
 - b. If God was referring to the Holy-day Sabbath, as the Pharisees believed, then Firstfruits would occur on Nisan 16. This view allowed for an unchanging date for the feast. Josephus, the first-century historian agreed with this view. (Passover--Nisan 14; Unleavened Bread--Nisan 15; Firstfruits--Nisan 16).
 - c. Today the Feast of Firstfruits is considered to fall on the 16th day of Nisan, with Pentecost falling fifty days later.
 - d. It has been suggested that the date-change for Firstfruits came after the resurrection of Jesus as an attempt to separate His resurrection from the feast. "The leaders must have been hard pressed to explain away the relevance of the feasts and their fulfillment in the Messiah. The solution they came up with was to obfuscate the calendar in such a way as to make the connection less clear between the feasts and . . . Christ. . . The strategy apparently worked because most Jewish people today see no connection whatever between the feasts and the Messiah." ²
2. "The Firstfruits celebration that occurs the day following the Sabbath after Passover is considered *Early Firstfruits*. Fifty days later the *Latter Firstfruits* occurs, called the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost)." ³
 3. The time between Early Firstfruits and Latter Firstfruits is called the "Counting of the Omer". "God commanded His people to count from the day after the Sabbath until the day that the Torah was given. This counting demonstrated how great the desire is for the day that commemorates the most special occasion." ⁴
 - a. Lev. 23:15-16 **READ**
 - b. "Omer" is a Hebrew word that means "sheaf, measure".
 - c. "Firstfruits was preeminently seen as a time marker. It marked the beginning of the grain harvest in Israel, but even more importantly, it marked the countdown to the Feast of Weeks." ⁵
 4. The term "Firstfruits" means "a promise to come." ⁶

B. This feast occurred during the first harvest of the spring. God required that the first and best of the barley harvest was to be set aside and presented as a wave offering by the priest in the temple.

1. "The farmers in Israel were required to mark the fruits and grains designated that were most progressed in their growth. After marking

² McCall as quoted by Hagee, pp. 58-59.

³ Scarlata, 1997, p. 197.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Howard, 1997, p. 77.

⁶ Scarlata, p. 197.

them, sometimes with a red yarn, the farmer would declare them to be firstfruits."⁷

2. "The Jewish observance of this festival has varied throughout history. In ancient practice, in the days of the Temple, it was quite an elaborate ceremony of bringing the offering as a thanksgiving tithe to God. The Talmud states that a priest would meet a group of Jewish pilgrims on the edge of the city and, from there, lead them up to the Temple mount. As they carried their offerings of the first fruits, the priest would lead a praise service with music, praise psalms and dance."⁸

C. None of the harvest could be eaten before the Firstfruits were offered to God.

D. "The only Firstfruits ritual which has survived to modern times has been the counting of the omer, the days from Firstfruits to Shavuot (the Feast of Weeks)."⁹

E. The subject of first things is one the Bible has much to say about.

Another, lesser known, custom associated with the deliverance from Egypt is also related to the idea of first things. Exodus 13:2 reveals that the firstborn male child (as well as animals) was to be consecrated to the Lord. This important ceremony is called the Pidyon Haben or "Redemption of the Son."

1. According to Num. 18:16, each firstborn son was to be presented to the priest at one month of age, in a dedication ceremony.
2. The Lord made provision for the firstborn to be redeemed from service in the temple by the payment of five shekels.
3. The sons of the priests and Levites were exempted from this provision; they were obligated to serve in the Temple.



⁷ Ibid, p. 199.

⁸ Kasdan, 1993, p. 40.

⁹ Howard, p. 82.

II. JESUS AND THE FEAST OF FIRSTFRUITS

A. **Jesus rose from the dead on the Feast of Firstfruits.** Firstfruits is a harvest festival and the barley sheaves are waved before the Lord. "The resurrection of the Messiah from the dead is perfectly symbolized in the wave offering of the first fruits." ¹⁰

1. Just prior to celebrating Passover with His disciples, Jesus told them "The hour has come for the son of Man to be glorified. 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. . . But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." John 12:23-24, 32

2. "The grain that had come from the earth was now lifted up high for all to see!"¹¹

3. Jesus fulfilled both views as to when Firstfruits should be observed by His resurrection. That particular year, Nisan 15 was a Friday--the day He died. He was in the tomb part of Friday, all of Saturday, and part of Sunday (beginning at sundown on Saturday) His resurrection just after sundown on Saturday was on the "day after the Sabbath" in the 7-day weekly sense and in the holy-day sense. "The year of Yeshua's death and resurrection was one of the few in which both rabbinical theories could be correct at the same time!" ¹²

B. **Jesus presented His firstfruits offering to the Father at His resurrection.** Matt. 27:52-53 indicate that tombs were opened and dead people walked into Jerusalem after Jesus' resurrection. "The Lord, not unlike a Jewish planter, gratefully showed the Father the early crops of what will be a magnificent harvest later on." ¹³



Garden Tomb

¹⁰ Kasdan, p. 44.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 43.

¹² Kasdan, p. 45.

¹³ Levit, p. 8.

C. Jesus was first publicly declared to be the Messiah at His "Redemption of the Son" ceremony. READ LUKE 2:22-39

1. Joseph and Mary had two objectives in going to the temple: to offer the required sacrifice for her purification and to present their firstborn son to the priest for redemption.
2. This was Jesus' earliest presentation to the Jewish people in Jerusalem.
3. I Peter 1:18-19, 21 ties this dedication ceremony to the events of Passover week: "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefather, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. . . Through Him you believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and glorified him."



Stairs to temple mount

D. Jesus will present another firstfruits offering to the Father during the tribulation. Rev. 14:1 reveals that He will seal 144,000 men as the first of God's working with national Israel. "They will be the proof, guarantee, or pledge (the firstfruits) of a future harvest within the nation of Israel. They will be the guarantee during the time of God's awesome wrath that He has not cast off His people."¹⁴

¹⁴ Howard, p. 86.

III. FIRSTFRUITS MADE PERSONAL

A. The question must be asked: How did the Feast of Firstfruits become Easter?

1. The Council of Nicea (325 C. E.) "established, among other edicts, that Christians would not be allowed to commemorate Passover but would observe the resurrection on a new holiday called Easter. According to this Church (the Roman Church), . . . Easter would be observed on the Sunday after the Spring Equinox."¹⁵
2. "Easter" comes from the name of a Babylonian goddess of fertility, "Ishtar". We continue to incorporate the objects used in the worship of this pagan goddess in our celebration of Easter: the rabbit, the egg, new costumes, etc.

B. The Feast of Firstfruits holds the promise for our future triumph over death. "'First' implies a second, a third, and so on, and that is the real meaning of the feast. . .the resurrection of the entire church!"¹⁶

1. I Cor. 15:20-23 "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him."
2. The resurrection of the Lord was marvelous but not a surprise, after all He raised the dead, walked on water and healed the sick. The real surprise is that we will also be raised victorious over death.



¹⁵ Kasdan, pp. 45-46.

¹⁶ Levitt, p. 7.

C. Firstfruits reminds us that we owe God the first of all that we possess.

By offering the firstfruits of their harvest, the Hebrews were declaring their faith in God's ability to provide for the needs of their families. "Firstfruits" means "a promise of things to come" and as such served as a pledge or guarantee that the remainder of the harvest would be realized.

1. Offering the first of all that we possess to God is an act of faith. It is a declaration of His ability to provide for our needs.
2. Offering the first of all that we possess is our reasonable service to our God who offered His first and best for our salvation.



D. We are the firstfruits of Christ. James 1:18 says "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created."

1. We are to be set apart to the Lord--a picture of firstfruits to the world. What kind of example do we leave?
2. Unleavened Bread teaches us to put off the old man; Firstfruits teaches us to put on the new man. Eph. 4:20-24
3. We are to walk worthy of the calling of God on our lives.

(conclusion)

John Hagee concludes his chapter on the Feast of Firstfruits with the following exhortation:

"Take some time today to consider your example as one of the firstfruits of Christ. Are you walking in His will? Are you taking time to read His Word? Is your life a channel through which He blesses others? Will others see Christ in you today?

The days are growing shorter; the time of Christ's appearing is closer today than it was yesterday. But still we are called to walk worthy of His calling. Still we are entrusted with the responsibility of showing the world a foretaste of heaven.

If you grew up singing the old hymns, you'll certainly recall this one by Knowles Shaw. It's a harvest song, and I can't sing it without picturing myself standing before the altar of God, lifting a golden sheaf that represents a lost soul redeemed by Christ.

'Sowing in the morning, sowing seeds of kindness, sowing in the noontide and the dewy eve; waiting for the harvest and the time of reaping, we shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.'¹⁷

¹⁷ Hagee, pp. 68-69.



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